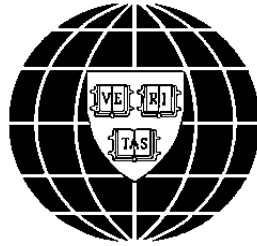


Personae Non Gratae:
Misunderstanding a Humanitarian Mission
at Juanchaco, Colombia



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Dedication

To the men and women of Task Force Steel Spike,
Fuertes Caminos 94 (South)-Colombia,
who performed their duties in a manner reflecting
the highest traditions of the United States armed forces.

Contents

<u>Chapter</u>	<u>Page</u>
DISCLAIMERii
DEDICATION.....	.iii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	.v
AUTHOR’S FOREWORD.....	.vi
1 INTRODUCTION: IMAGINING THE GOOD.....	1
2 STATUTORY GOODWILL: HUMANITARIAN AND CIVIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.....	4
3 PICKING JUANCHACO: DEVELOPING THE PROJECT	7
4 PUBLIC AFFAIRS: DUELING STRATEGIES	14
5 COLOMBIA IN DECEMBER 1993: THE BATTLEFIELD PREPARED.....	21
6 WORD WAR I: THE BATTLE IS JOINED	24
7 POLLS APART: POINTS OF VIEW	29
8 TRUE PERSPECTIVE: ENGINEERS ON THE FRONT LINES.....	37
9 WORD WAR II: THE MEDIA BATTLE CONTINUES.....	43
10 AFTERMATH: POLICING THE BATTLEFIELD.....	47
11 SOME LESSONS LEARNED: SUPPORT TO PREVENT OR WIN FUTURE BATTLES.....	50
SELECTED REFERENCES	55

Illustrations

<u>Figure</u>	
1	Map of Juanchaco area, Colombia
2	SouthCom’s Theater Strategic Objectives, 1993
3	Divergent Objectives at Juanchaco.
4	Media Quotes, Disinformation Campaign ...
5	Sample Commentary, Presidential Candidates

6	Diagram of Juanchaco Work Site.42
7	Divergent Objectives at Juanchaco.48

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This is nuts! What's going on?
--General Barry R. McCaffrey
Commander in Chief, U.S. SouthCom
February 1994, upon being briefed on the exercise at Juanchaco

Author's Foreword

On January 17, 1996, during a visit to the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington, DC, I was introduced to the former Colombian President and current OAS Secretary General, César Gaviria Trujillo, with the comment, "This is Donald Higgins; he is researching Juanchaco." Upon hearing the word "Juanchaco," Gaviria grimaced and threw back his head, howling in feigned agony.

Another time, I telephoned a former high ranking official of the United States Embassy, Bogota, Colombia, and asked him for his views on the Humanitarian and Civic Assistance exercise at Juanchaco in late 1993 and early 1994. This senior diplomat, who had made some of the most controversial and key decisions during the exercise, politely but firmly refused to even discuss the issue with me, and he told me that he thought my pursuit of the topic was ill advised.

Now, I must make it clear that "Juanchaco" was not an armed intervention, nor a military response to a national emergency, nor a bilateral wargame gone bad--it was simply a military engineering exercise with the humanitarian goal of building some infrastructure in a poor part of Colombia. Yet the two events described above firmly highlighted to me the pain that a tainted operation--even a relatively insignificant one--can cause, even after two years. This particular exercise should have boosted the image of the United States in Colombian public opinion, and should have made the U.S. Embassy and the United States Southern Command (SouthCom) immensely proud of themselves and their soldiers, who had done a superb job under impossible conditions. Instead, the exercise had the exact opposite effect. I was astounded.

At the time of the exercise, I was "holding down the fort" at SouthCom's office of the Commander in Chief (CINC), monitoring activities while awaiting the appointment of a new CINC, due to arrive at the Headquarters in Panama in February 1994, about the time the exercise wound down. When incredibly negative, bizarre news reports about a U.S. humanitarian exercise began to cross my desk, I decided to collect the articles to use later in assessing the fallout I was sure must result from this operation--an effort from which even our own Embassy in Bogota seemed to distance itself, referring to it as a "U.S. intervention." But following the exercise, I was astonished to see that no one in the Command, the Department of Defense, or the Department of State ever (to my knowledge) wrote an article describing how Juanchaco became a debacle. The ongoing Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, then the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio in Mexico on March 23, then the election of Gaviria as OAS Secretary General on March 27, then the collapse of the peso, and so on, all drew attention away from Juanchaco and Colombia--and Juanchaco was still too painful a memory for many of those involved. I resolved to write down these events, not only as a record of a job well done (by

the engineers), but also for possible future use as a case study, so that perhaps someone may avoid making the same mistakes again.

Personae Non Gratae:

Misunderstanding a Humanitarian Mission at Juanchaco, Colombia

*There's an American saying that no good deed should go unpunished,
and that's exactly the way I felt about Juanchaco.*

--Ambassador Morris Busby¹

1. Introduction: Imagining the Good

Imagine a scene in which United States military engineers--the wartime builders of command bunkers, field hospitals, and runways for jet fighters--brought their skills to the poorest reaches of the Third World to construct schools, clinics, and access roads at no cost to the local populace. This scenario, part of the Defense Department's Humanitarian and Civic Assistance (HCA) program, exists under United States law in the form of military exercises sponsored by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and, in Latin America, by the United States Southern Command (SouthCom). If it falls short of the biblical peace ideal of beating swords into plowshares,² it comes close, hitching the Army mule to plow nonetheless. More difficult to imagine might be the fact that Army engineers did such a thing in the Republic of Colombia, in cooperation with the Colombian government, and that their help was overwhelmingly rejected, in disbelief and scandal, by the people of Colombia.

In late 1993 and early 1994, the "plowing" took place on the impoverished Pacific Coast of Colombia, at the tiny hamlet of Juanchaco, one hundred ten kilometers from the cocaine cartel headquarters of Cali, in the Valle del Cauca Department (see map, Figure 1). While helping a needy community, the primary goal was to hone the talents of the 46th Engineer Battalion, out of Fort Rucker, Alabama, in the austere environment provided by Colombia's remote coastal area. United States Ambassador Morris Busby had lobbied SouthCom long and hard for just such an exercise to advance the goals of his Colombia country team,³ and the SouthCom Commander in Chief, General George Joulwan, offered the construction of a school, a clinic, and an access road in an effort that he hoped would see United States and Colombian military engineers, and community members, working side by side. Planners at SouthCom's Panama Headquarters looked to the exercise as a way to broaden engagement with the Colombian military, which

¹Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

²Isaiah 2:4. *And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.* See also Joel 3:10 for follow-on use of plowshares.

³Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

worked closely with United States forces in the fight against criminal narcotics trafficking, yet had not recently collaborated in anything that would strictly benefit civilian communities.

Although coordinated and approved among the Colombian Ministry of Defense, United States Embassy, United States Department of State, and United States Department of Defense, the Juanchaco HCA exercise ignited a firestorm of controversy within the politically and emotionally charged atmosphere of the Republic of Colombia. A unilateral United States Embassy news release seemed to impose an American presence on Colombia. The media and astonished citizenry confronted the bewildered arriving American military engineers with a barrage of queries, demanding to know their mission, armament, length of stay, and real intent. But an inadequate and passive public affairs policy, which kept essential details from the Colombian public, forbade the soldiers to speak, and left the media guessing.

The resulting perception of conspiracy, secrecy, and government coverup was exploited not only by nationalistic sentiment and domestic political opposition, but also by forces hostile to good United States-Colombian relations. Colombian and international media claimed the United States had violated Colombia's sovereignty and constitution in the United States effort to build anything from secret invasion bases to toxic waste dumps. The President of the Republic was called upon to explain his handling of the exercise and his alleged violation of the Republic's constitution. Even nature refused to cooperate. An early rainy season prevented the completion of the construction by the scheduled date, and the political mood made staying past the declared end-date unthinkable. The United States troops thus departed Colombia without fully accomplishing their mission, reinforcing the feelings of doubt and mistrust that had existed from the very beginning. A reputation the United States military had worked years to build with its humanitarian and civic assistance program had been thoroughly soiled.

Juanchaco

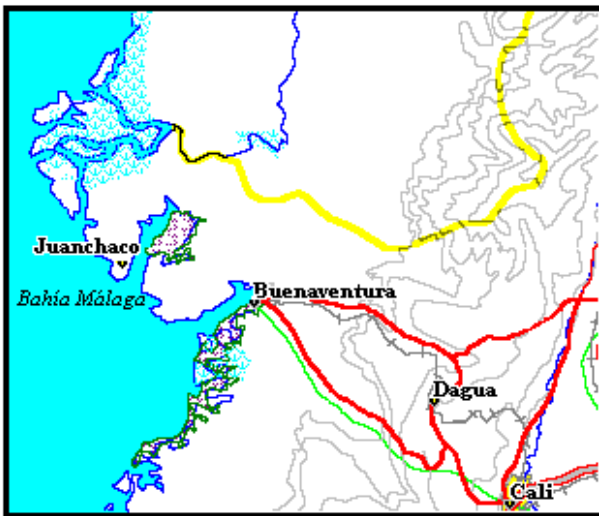
Valle del Cauca Department,
Republic of Colombia

Population: 1,300 (Juanchaco proper)
3,000 (including outlying areas)

South America



Source: Political and Physical Map of Colombia.



Area enlarged above

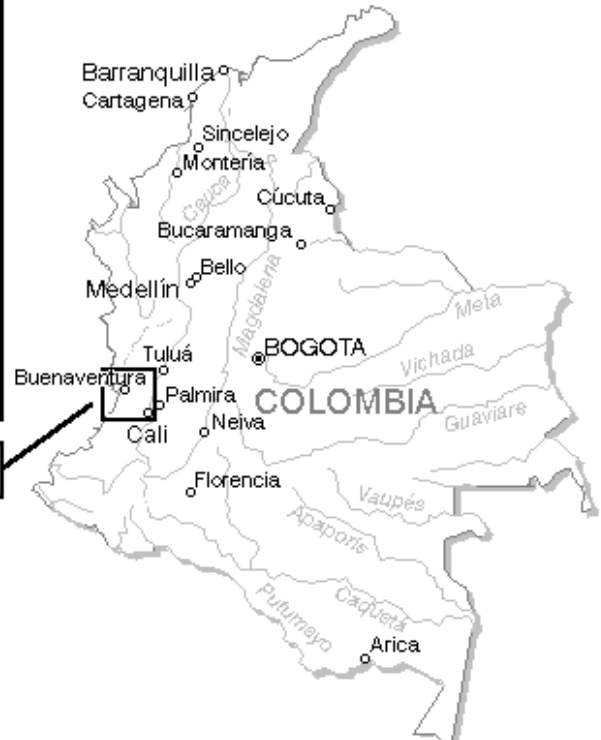


Figure 1. Juanchaco Area, Colombia

Freeport, ME: DeLorme Mapping, 1993.

By working hand-in-hand with the host nation, in consonance with each Ambassador's Country Plan, trust and confidence are inspired, and meaningful contributions are made to the quality of life of the host nation populace. Schools promote literacy, clinics and wells improve health, and farm-to-market roads stimulate local economies. The goodwill engendered encourages nation-to-nation cooperation in much more significant endeavors.

--Colonel Terry L. Rice, Command Engineer
"Fuertes Caminos - A Joint Training Exercise
Plus Much More"⁴

2. Statutory Goodwill: Humanitarian and Civic Assistance Program

As Commander in Chief (CINC) of SouthCom, General Joulwan seized upon HCA engineering exercises as a means of "peacetime engagement" of allied military forces, feeling that together, United States and Latin American militaries could contribute in solid ways toward sustaining the democracy that by 1993 was a defining characteristic of Central and South America, his theater of operations. Addressing the Senate Armed Services Committee in April 1993, Joulwan noted that HCA deployments presented opportunities for deployed United States forces to derive distinctive benefits while working alongside their host nation counterparts:

These deployments truly represent a "win-win" situation. U.S. forces get unique training opportunities in environments that would be hard, if not impossible, to duplicate in CONUS [continental United States], while the host nation receives much needed support which, in turn, contributes to stability, economic and social development, all of which strengthens democracy.⁵

Congress had been dealing with a formal HCA program for nearly a decade, and looked upon it as a useful component of United States foreign policy in allied countries. Back in the 1980s,

. . . attributable in part to growing U.S. interest in events in Latin America and in part to the civil war in Afghanistan, the National Security Council asked DoD [Department of Defense] to study ways the U.S. military could provide nonlethal assistance to factions believed to be in support of democracy. The Secretary of Defense initiated a study that concluded that DoD assistance for certain humanitarian assistance activities would be appropriate. Since 1985, when Congress first authorized such assistance, [the Department of Defense has carried out projects] . . . within the regional commands to help build or repair a country's infrastructure (e.g., roads, clinics, and schools) and provide limited health care to rural populations.⁶

⁴Colonel Terry L. Rice, "Fuertes Caminos - A Joint Training Exercise Plus Much More," The LATAM Engineer: Que Pasa, Vol 1, n4, Mar 94, 3.

⁵General George A. Joulwan, U.S. Army, "Continued Engagement Needed in Southern Command Region," Defense Issues, Vol. 8, No. 24, April 21 1993, 1.

⁶"Role of the DoD in Humanitarian Assistance, Hearing, House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, April

Establishing the HCA program under Title 10, United States Code, Congress recognized the need for an interagency approach to an essentially military program, since clearly the aid provided went far beyond strictly military relationships into sectors of civil society that were within the purview of the Ambassador and the Department of State. The basic law permitted military HCA under two conditions: the assistance must advance the security interests of both the United States and the host nation, and it must also enhance the operational skills of the military members involved. Beyond that, to ensure interagency planning, coordination and cooperation, the lawmakers wrote guidelines mandating Secretary of State approval of HCA activities in foreign countries and requiring that the HCA complement (but not duplicate) other United States government assistance, and that it meet the basic socio-economic needs of the local populace. It provided for HCA, and the money that went with it, for use in civilian projects only, specifically forbidding its use for “. . . any individual, group, or organization engaged in military or paramilitary activity.”⁷

In the decade since its inception, the program generated criticism as well as enthusiasm. In April 1994, United States Representative Norman Sisisky (D-VA), chairman of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, acknowledged, “. . . these [HCA] programs are criticized by some as inappropriate for DoD because they are really foreign policy matters rather than defense matters. These prospects, however, are praised by others as the type of human outreach DoD should embrace in the post-Cold War world.”⁸

Other members felt HCA was not just worth embracing for its outreach potential, but because it made good military training sense. At the same hearing, Representative John Tanner (D-TN) observed, “. . . it is hard for me to imagine a program that would work better in the interest of this country, both from the standpoint of training our troops and incurring goodwill from the host nation. It is hard to imagine any program anywhere.”⁹

SouthCom, for its part, fully embraced HCA, drawing nearly 5,000 troops from 39 National Guard and Reserve units in 27 states, between October 1993 and June 1994, to work on Latin American civic assistance projects.¹⁰ HCA proved an effective, efficient way for SouthCom to engage Latin American militaries, building up bilateral relationships while meeting its stated theater strategic objectives. The Command found that working in coordination with an allied nation’s government to build needed

19, 1994” (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1995), 50.

⁷United States Code, 1994 Edition, Vol 3, Title 10, Chapter 20, Sec 401 (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1995), 445.

⁸“Role of the DoD in Humanitarian Assistance, Hearing, House of Representatives Committee on Armed Services, April 19, 1994” (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1995), 1.

⁹*Ibid*, 23.

¹⁰Sergeant First Class G. Russell Walden, “Humanitarian Projects Break Ground,” *The LATAM Engineer: Que Pasa*, Vol 1, n2, Sep 93, 8.

infrastructure directly contributed toward its objectives of strengthening democratic institutions and supporting continued economic and social progress (see Figure 2, SouthCom theater objectives). Working side by side with allied military engineers, United States military engineers would demonstrate by their example proper roles of professional military forces in democratic societies.

Getting the forces in position to meet the HCA goals required a desire on the part of the United States Ambassador. As in all SouthCom deployments, the Ambassador's permission was necessary to ensure a United States military presence would further the foreign policy goals of his country team. Once the Ambassador decided that United States forces would help in his overall plan for the host nation, he authorized the deployment. The deployment itself was commanded through a military chain of command through the SouthCom CINC and ultimately to the President. This sensible and clear division of authority between the Ambassador and CINC was wisely laid out in United States Code,¹¹ and although it had served United States foreign policy well, it had yet to be applied in an HCA exercise in Colombia.

Figure 2. SouthCom's Theater Strategic Objectives, 1993

- strengthen democratic institutions,
- assist host nations in eliminating threats to national and regional security,
- support continued economic and social progress,
- assist host nations in defeating drug production and trafficking,
- with government of Panama, ensure an open and neutral Panama Canal,
- enhance the roles of professional military forces in democratic societies.

[Source: United States Southern Command-SCI5 "Southern Theater Strategy" briefing, 5 Mar 93]

¹¹Title 10, U.S. Code, 164 "Commanders of Combatant Commands: Assignment; Powers and Duties," and Title 22, U.S. Code, 3927 "Chiefs of Mission."

We agreed that the Juanchaco project was probably the right thing to do for a whole variety of reasons. It was the right part of the country to do something; it was a good opportunity to work together and do some training. It was a good humanitarian project and would make the gringos look good, right? I mean, it was perfect!
--Ambassador Morris Busby¹²

3. Picking Juanchaco: Developing the Project

Despite its long history of democracy,¹³ Colombian society saw its armed forces engaged in real war within the Republic, fighting three major insurgencies and a prolonged conflict against the forces of narcotics trafficking cartels. And, Joulwan noted, they were taking casualties:

*There continues to be clear, substantiated evidence of the linkage between the drug traffickers and the insurgents, and this significantly increases the complexity of dealing with both. . . . Last year [1992] there were over 27,000 violent deaths and over 400 police officers were killed. But in spite of this, Colombia remains committed.*¹⁴

United States forces significantly supported Colombia's struggle, predominantly through training, equipping, planning and intelligence sharing, and in 1993 Colombia remained the largest hemispheric recipient of United States foreign military aid.¹⁵

Under the administration of President César Gaviria Trujillo, Colombia's most violent criminal organization, the Medellín cocaine cartel, had been decimated by the Colombian forces, and to Ambassador Busby, the environment seemed relatively safe now for a humanitarian engineering exercise. He was anxious to broaden the scope of United States assistance to Colombia, and appealed to General Joulwan for an HCA exercise, hopefully a large-scale one, such as those of the *Fuertes Caminos* (FC) [Strong Roads] series.¹⁶ Joulwan agreed in concept, and instructed Major General John Thompson, his

¹²Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

¹³Colombia, unlike many Latin American countries, maintained a tradition of civilian government and regular, free elections. The military has seized power only three times in Colombia's history [since 1819]: in 1830, when Ecuador and Venezuela withdrew from the Republic; in 1854; and in 1953-57. In the first two instances, civilian rule was restored within a year. [From "Background Notes: Colombia," U.S. Department of State Bureau of Public Affairs, November 1994]

¹⁴General George A. Joulwan, U.S. Army, "Continued Engagement Needed in Southern Command Region," *Defense Issues*, Vol. 8., No. 24, April 21, 1993, 2-3.

¹⁵"Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Military Assistance Facts," Department of Defense Security Assistance Agency, Sep 30 1993, 45, 101.

¹⁶In the hierarchy of engineering exercises, FC was topmost and most sought after, normally involving multiple construction

Director of Operations, and Colonel Terry Rice, his Command Engineer, to come up with a Colombia option in the planning for the fiscal year 1994 *Fuertes Caminos* program.¹⁷ In Colombia, Busby's Embassy country team, in coordination with the Colombian Ministry of Defense, drew up a list of six possible projects and sent it to Rice and the SouthCom operations planners in June 1993 for their consideration. The most feasible was an operation in the small village named Juanchaco.¹⁸

The Pacific Coast region around Juanchaco looked especially promising for several reasons. Located near the Colombian naval base at Bahía Málaga [Malaga Bay] for military logistic support, the hamlet's coastal situation would also provide for easy handling of the heavy United States construction equipment that would come by ship from Panama.¹⁹ Moreover, with its beautiful black sand beaches and location only a hundred kilometers from the large city of Cali,²⁰ it exuded potential for economic development as a tourist site. The location presented problems, however. Way out of the Colombian mainstream, the very poor, largely black population felt abandoned by the Colombian government,²¹ and boasted no infrastructure through which to bring in the tourists.²² In mid-1993, the only practical ways into Juanchaco were by foot, boat, or by helicopter.²³

projects and costing up to \$3 million an exercise. Less ambitious exercises, such as those of the *Cosecha Amistad* (Harvest Friendship) series, were of a much smaller scale. Hence, getting approval for an FC exercise was a feather in the Ambassador's cap, since it meant large amounts of cash to the host nation, which normally would receive contracts for the supplies used in the construction, as well as for the living expenses of the visiting troops.

¹⁷Colonel Terry L. Rice, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 4 1995.

¹⁸Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

¹⁹Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, from an unpublished draft of his memoirs, November 1995, 168-169.

²⁰"*Republica de Colombia, Mapa Politico Administrativo*," 1:1,500,000 scale. Bogotá: *Instituto Geografico "Agustin Codazzi*," 1989.

²¹Jaime Arocha Rodriguez, "Afro-Colombia Denied," *Report on the Americas*, Feb 1992, v25, n4, 28-31. In an Oct 25 1995 interview with the author, former Minister of Government Fabio Villegas Ramirez observed,

. . . Generally the Pacific coast is quite depressed, and quite poor, . . . and the core of the black population of Colombia is located in the coast of the Pacific. . . . Of course there is this sort of complaint [that the government has abandoned the Pacific coast], not only there but in a lot of different spots in Colombia, but I will say that the Pacific area would have been poorer, and the specific situation of the black population, their rights, the way they are connected with the development of the Colombian institutions, is an important issue. It's not a critical one, but it's important and was taken into account during the 1991 Constitution.

²²Colonel Thomas R. Carstens, U.S. Marine Corps, Commander of the U.S. Military Group in Colombia, interviewed by the author, Oct 27 1995.

²³Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995. Additionally, at least two media events commented on the isolation of the area and the limited ways people could reach Juanchaco: "Governor Assures Agreement Limits U.S. Troop Activities," on Caracol's 0600-0900 Newscast, Bogota *Emisoras Caracol* Network, 1227 GMT, Jan 3 1994 (Reported by

The site was important to the Colombian Navy, too. The commander of the Bahía Málaga base, Rear Admiral José Ignacio Rozo Carvajal, specifically requested Juanchaco's consideration for development. Juanchaco served as home for civilian employees of the base at Bahía Málaga, and Rozo felt that with infrastructure improvement the quality of life could be improved for the Navy's support people.²⁴

Officials of the Valle del Cauca Department originally wanted the Americans to lengthen and surface a World War II-era dirt runway at Juanchaco, to increase the appeal of the coastal area to the big city tourists.²⁵ Ambassador Busby agreed, and felt the Colombians could also use the airfield as an interceptor base to fly against cocaine smugglers.²⁶

On July 12, Busby paid a personal visit to Joulwan's headquarters at Quarry Heights and sat in on a SouthCom staff meeting. Following the operations update, Joulwan pointed to Rice and said, "Buzz, this is my engineer, and he's the guy who's going to make *Fuertes Caminos* happen in Colombia this year."²⁷

Thus introduced, Colonel Rice flew to Colombia later in July to meet with the country team and discuss the venue, carrying with him General Joulwan's absolute condition that the government of Colombia must be seen as being 100 percent behind the exercise, or it could not be held in fiscal 1994. Rice laid out options to Ambassador Busby, and recommended that FC Colombia be delayed a year, due to the late stage of planning for an exercise that might include building an airport and the perceived difficulty in getting host nation support and approval for the exercise.

Busby's response was that he needed the exercise in Colombia, in 1994, and he would ensure Colombian backing for it.²⁸

General Joulwan rounded up his planners upon Rice's return to the headquarters in Panama, and they sat down to "make it fit" within the planning constraints imposed by the mere four months remaining until the start of the 1994 fiscal year. They decided to downscale the exercise to minor building projects in a two-month period. Upon hearing this news from Joulwan, Ambassador Busby expressed dismay at the need to reduce the scope of the exercise, but concurred.²⁹ By August, the Embassy, the Colombians

FBIS Chiva Chiva PM, 031629Z Jan 94), and a January 20 1994 article in *El Espectador* (Reported by message, American Embassy Bogota to USIA Washington, 241436Z Jan 94, "Press Summary--The Presence of U.S. Forces in Colombia").

²⁴Rafael Pardo Rueda, Former Defense Minister, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Oct 20 1995.

²⁵*Ibid.*

²⁶Colonel Terry L. Rice, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 4 1995.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*, plus memorandum, SouthCom Public Affairs, "FC94 South (Colombia) Public Affairs Issues," Jan 14 1994, and fact sheet, SouthCom Command Engineer, "*Fuertes Caminos* 94 (South)--Colombia," Feb 16 1994.

²⁹Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

and SouthCom all endorsed Juanchaco as the site for the upcoming exercise.³⁰

Former Colombian Minister of Defense Rafael Pardo Rueda remembered:

In June of '93 the United States Ambassador presented me the possibility that a group of U.S. Army engineers would conduct in the country an exercise that would leave a tangible product. For several years Army engineer units of that country conducted exercises in the construction of small works in Latin America within a program they called "Fuertes Caminos [Strong Roads]." The training was designed for a place in which heavy machinery could be brought in by sea.

The area of Juanchaco was selected since it is a town with many unsatisfied basic needs, located near the Bahía Málaga base, and the first work that sprang up in the list of possibilities was the construction of an airstrip in the locality. This job was an important requirement for the village, which, with an adequate runway, would be able to have regular flight service to bring tourists from the Valle del Cauca to the beaches of Juanchaco, which are closest to Cali. This landing strip was also important for the Navy, since with it they would be able to supply this important naval base by air and would be able to use the runway as an aerial patrol station for that zone of the Pacific.

Nevertheless, during the process of defining the projects, the Valle del Cauca government, which was also interested in the runway, budgeted sufficient money for this task and, in coordination with the governor, proceeded to contract for its construction with the Agustin Codazzi Engineer Battalion, based at Palmira. Thus was the runway discarded as a project for the Fuertes Caminos plan, and the construction of a school and health clinic was selected in coordination by the U.S. military mission with the headquarters of the Málaga base.³¹

Upon finalization, the projects left were the building of a school, a clinic, and a 5-kilometer access road from the landing beaches to the construction site,³² and both Joulwan and Busby now seemed satisfied with the scope of the project. The Department of State ratified the agreement, giving its stamp of approval without comment to the Juanchaco HCA exercise.³³ It seemed that the exercise at Juanchaco would meet the objectives of the three primary players in *Fuertes Caminos*--the Colombian government, the United States Ambassador, and the United States Southern Command (see Figure 3, below)--the problem now was how to make it happen.

Further details had to be worked out with the Colombians, however, to determine whose military accomplished which part of the construction, and with the Codazzi Engineer Battalion working on the runway, the Colombians only agreed to help with the access road, leaving the bulk of the FC project to the

³⁰Memorandum, SouthCom Operations Directorate (SCJ3-DDX), "Response to Ms G. Todd's Question's [sic] Regarding Juan Chaco [sic], CO," Mar 4 1994.

³¹Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, from an unpublished draft of his memoirs, November 1995, 168-169.

³²Rafael Pardo Rueda, interviewed by the author, Oct 20 1995; SouthCom Director of Operations, Memorandum of Instruction: "Exercise *Fuertes Caminos* 94-South in Colombia (Ph I) and Paraguay (Ph II)," Sep 1993; and SouthCom Command Engineer, "FY 94 Military Construction Project Data, *Fuertes Caminos* 94-S," DD Form 1391, Nov 9 1993.

³³Department of State official, interviewed on background, Apr 3,1996.

Americans, who would accomplish their portion of the projects in January and February 1994.³⁴ Ambassador Busby, as the United States government representative, signed the exercise memorandum of agreement with Minister Pardo, as the representative of the Colombian government, on October 29. The SouthCom staff had slight reservations about the arrangement--in view of Joulwan's policy of clear host nation support, no one was certain that the Minister of Defense had the authority to represent the Colombian nation, and the Colombian Congress had not approved the deployment. However, Ambassador Busby assured the Command that all was proper, and the planning continued.³⁵

Figure 3. Divergent Objectives at Juanchaco

- Government of Colombia:
 - ✦ Conduct military teambuilding with the United States
 - ✦ Improve government access to the area
 - ✦ Support naval base workers living in or near Juanchaco
 - ✦ Build local infrastructure

[Source: Interviews with former MoD Rafael Pardo, Oct 20 1995 and Nov 14 1995]

- United States Ambassador:
 - ✦ Strengthen United States-Colombian relationship
 - ✦ Develop a neglected part of Colombia
 - ✦ Enhance United States image in Colombia
 - ✦ Assist people of Colombia (humanitarian action)

[Source: Interview with former U.S. Ambassador Morris Busby, Dec 8 1995]

- United States Southern Command:
 - ✦ Train Army engineers in austere environment
 - ✦ Assist people of Colombia (humanitarian action)
 - ✦ Demonstrate United States resolve in the region
 - ✦ Strengthen democracy in accordance with Strategic Objectives (Fig. 2)

[Source: Message, SouthCom Public Affairs (012215Z Dec 93), "Proposed Press Guidance: *Fuertes Caminos* 94-South (Colombia)," Dec 1 1993.]

At this late stage, with less than two months remaining before troops were to arrive at Juanchaco, the Army's Forces Command (FORSCOM) struggled to identify an engineering unit to deploy. In normal circumstances, with planning eighteen months out, FORSCOM generally selected a National Guard or Reserve organization to benefit from training in the exotic locale. But with only sixty days left, it quickly settled upon the 46th Engineer Battalion, an active duty unit at Fort Rucker, Alabama, which already had

³⁴Message, Commander, United States Army South (CDR USARSO, 280145Z Feb 94), "*Fuertes Caminos* 94 (S) Colombia, TF 46, Close Out," Feb 28 1994.

³⁵Message report of United States Army South Engineer (CDR USARSO/SOCM-EN, 281700Z Oct 93), "*Fuertes Caminos* 94 (South) - Colombia, Initial Planning Conference - Wrapup Message #1," Oct 28 1993.

its “A” Company in El Salvador working on another FC exercise, and could be sent on short notice. Major Mark Abernathy, the battalion operations officer, was appointed the FC deployment commander for Juanchaco, and would lead an organization there named “Task Force Steel Spike.”³⁶

While Abernathy and the task force worked the administrative and logistic details of the flow of people and supplies to Panama and thence to Colombia, SouthCom’s engineers were still working with Colombian government planners on the buildings. Rice’s staff engineers and representatives of Busby’s country team undertook site surveys³⁷ and, together with Valle del Cauca department planners and Juanchaco community leaders, the United States engineers considered locations and preliminary designs for the school, clinic, and access road.³⁸ After rejecting a site too near the ocean³⁹ and a site in the middle of town, Admiral Rozo and Ms. Luz Penagos, the Valle government’s project planner, gave their blessing to a site on public land they considered sufficiently accessible by the people of Juanchaco and the nearby settlement of Ladrilleros.⁴⁰

Exercise planners budgeted construction materials for the building projects at \$50,000 each for the clinic and school, based upon experience with similar projects in the region and data provided by the Colombian government.⁴¹ All the necessary items would come from suppliers located in Cali and Buenaventura. However, these two cities were “off limits” to Americans because of the reported threat of violence to foreigners, so the Embassy’s contracting office arranged the contracts through Colombian businesses, and Colombians went to Cali and Buenaventura to bid on the materials.

On December 4, a red warning flag went up in the SouthCom operations and engineering staffs as the Colombian estimates suddenly jumped \$134,000, to \$234,000 total. Upon solicitations in Cali and Buenaventura, \$60,000 had been added to the price of materials, \$30,000 added for delivery costs, \$30,000 added for “overhead and profit,” and the Colombian government had charged \$14,000 tax.⁴²

³⁶Major Mark H. Abernathy, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 12 1995, and message, SouthCom Public Affairs to DoD Public Affairs (012215Z Dec 93), “Proposed Press Guidance: *Fuertes Caminos* 94-South (Colombia),” Dec 1 1993.

³⁷Memorandum, SouthCom Command Engineer, “FC-94 Colombia,” Oct 14 1993.

³⁸Message report of U.S. Army South engineers (USARSO/SOCM-EN), “*Fuertes Caminos* 94 (South) - Colombia, Initial Planning Conference - Wrapup Message #1” (281700Z Oct 93), Oct 28 1993.

³⁹Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

⁴⁰Message report of U.S. Army South engineers (USARSO/SOCM-EN), “*Fuertes Caminos* 94 (South) - Colombia, Initial Planning Conference - Wrapup Message #1” (281700Z Oct 93), Oct 28 1993.

⁴¹Memorandum, SouthCom J3 Deputy Director for Contingencies, “Cost Developments for *Fuertes Caminos* 94 (South) Colombia Phase 1,” Dec 8 1993.

⁴²Memorandum, U.S. Army South Engineer (SOCM-EN), “FC 94 (S) Colombia Phase I HCA Funding Alignment,” Dec 3 1993.

Finding this turn of events suspicious, the engineers expressed their concern to the Military Group at the Embassy in Bogotá. An Embassy contracting office representative called the contractor and relayed SouthCom's uneasiness. The United States Army South (USARSO) engineer reported that following the telephone call by Ms. Rubio at the contracting office, somehow costs dropped \$37,000.⁴³

USARSO was the source of additional eyes that now watched the exercise from Panama. Since the 46th Engineer Battalion was an Army unit, and SouthCom was a unified command, the SouthCom Army component, USARSO, also headquartered in Panama, was appointed executive agent for the exercise, and its own engineers were by now heavily involved in the exercise. During a review of the transition from the SouthCom planners to the USARSO overseers of the operation, Brigadier General James Wilson, the USARSO deputy commander, found Abernathy's "Steel Spike," taken from the 46th Engineer Battalion's uniform patch and motto, too suggestive of a fighting force. Additionally, its abbreviation, "Task Force SS," evoked images of Nazi storm troopers, so Wilson directed that it not be used publicly; hence the task force (TF) was thereafter referred to as "TF 46," for the 46th Engineer Battalion, or occasionally as simply "TF Spike."⁴⁴

By the end of December, a week before the exercise was to start, the opening ceremony was canceled.⁴⁵ The ceremony, at which Colombian government and United States Embassy dignitaries, and Colombian and United States military officers (normally including SouthCom's CINC) would officially initiate the exercise in a bi-national show of support, was a tradition in the FC series of exercises. But SouthCom had no CINC to attend it. In mid-October, following his confirmation as the new Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, Joulwan had packed his bags and moved to Belgium, and his replacement as CINC SouthCom had not been named.

In one of his last missives, General Joulwan had sent a message to his resident and visiting engineering units offering guidance for the conduct of HCA construction. He emphasized two important points: he insisted on the completion and high quality of any work started, and he advised the development of a comprehensive public relations plan that integrated public and civil affairs experts into all construction efforts.⁴⁶

⁴³Memorandum, U.S. Army South Engineer (USARSO/SOCM-EN), "Bill of Material Costs FC 94 (S) - Colombia," Dec 9 1993. The Defense Department's Humanitarian Refugee Affairs office reported in its final tally for funds at the end of fiscal year 1994 that the HCA cost of the school had been \$131,000, and of the clinic \$63,000. Colonel Rice's estimate for the cost of the road materials was \$75,000. Transportation, living, and labor expenses of the TF 46 soldiers were not reported.

⁴⁴Major Mark H. Abernathy, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Feb 28 1996, plus memorandum, HQ SouthCom J3 DDC "Call from Capt Allen on FC(S) 94," Feb 25 1994; and message from USARSO Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations (USARSO/SOOP-OP), "*Fuertes Caminos* 94 (South) - Colombia Project Status" (092100 Feb 94), Feb 9 1994.

⁴⁵Memorandum, HQ SouthCom J3, Deputy Director for Contingencies (DDC), "Significant Activities for 22 Dec 93," Dec 22 1993.

⁴⁶General George Joulwan, "The Peacetime Engagement Battlefield--Engineers Have Been Moved to the Front Lines," The LATAM Engineer: *Que Pasa*, Vol 1, n2, Sept 1993, 3.

The wise general in his deliberations must consider both favorable and unfavorable factors. By taking into account the favorable factors, he makes his plan feasible; by taking into account the unfavorable, he may resolve the difficulties. . . . With many calculations, one can win; with few one cannot. How much less chance of victory has one who makes none at all! By this means I examine the situation and the outcome will be clearly apparent.

--Sun Tzu, 400-320 B.C.

The Art of War, viii, I⁴⁷

4. Public Affairs: Dueling Strategies

SouthCom, which for some time had conducted at least three major HCA exercises each year in the *Fuertes Caminos* series, felt it had a winning formula in its public affairs plan. SouthCom had evolved a routine based on a policy of openness and media access. An initial announcement by the host nation government, laying out the exercise facts and goals, was followed by an aggressive campaign in which reporters were invited on-site to talk with and observe American soldiers laboring “shoulder to shoulder” with host nation civilian workers and military engineers. In addition to formally trained public affairs officers, of critical importance to the public affairs effort was the participation of civil affairs and psychological operations (psyops) professionals. Colonel Jim Fetig, SouthCom’s Public Affairs Director, explained:

*They have resources and capabilities that the public affairs function does not have. Civil affairs troops go in and prepare the local population, and work with the leadership, while psyops units prepare mass communications, and they can do it in the native language and they do it with T-shirts and posters, bumper stickers, and the like. They prepare local radio spots and all sorts of materials that the public affairs people have no resources to produce. Public affairs is resourced to deal with mainstream news media only, and not resourced to detach people and actually put them in as part of these operations.*⁴⁸

This routine had been worked out through bittersweet experience. An HCA exercise in Bolivia in late 1992 had resulted in unfavorable news reports when its public affairs (PA) organization had not clearly publicized and explained the planned activities. Rumors led to threats of violence against the troops, prompting Joulwan to withdraw them early from the project.⁴⁹ The SouthCom PA office had taken a black eye over this and refined its game plan.

⁴⁷Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations (Annapolis MD: United States Naval Institute, 1966), 106.

⁴⁸Colonel James L. Fetig, U.S. Army, former SouthCom Public Affairs Director, interviewed by the author, Jan 18 1996.

⁴⁹*ibid.*

Over the next few HCA outings, in Guatemala, Panama, and El Salvador, Colonel Fetig oversaw hard-won success. The toughest was a controversial *Fuertes Caminos* exercise in El Salvador, a nation recovering from years of civil war. The Salvadoran and United States militaries, and the local populace planned to construct wells, schools, community centers and a clinic.⁵⁰ There, initial attempts by the FMLN (*Farabundo Martí de Liberación Nacional*) guerrilla group to portray the exercise as another “gringo invasion” and a clear violation of sovereignty⁵¹ were countered by absolute openness and honesty by the Embassy, the national government and the deployed forces. On September 3, 1993, when General Joulwan and President Alfredo Cristiani stood side-by-side at the podium during the *Fuertes Caminos* opening ceremony, they were embarrassed by hecklers chanting, “Go to hell, *Gringos!* Go to hell, *Gringos!*”⁵²

President Cristiani and his government, however, remained solidly behind the United States presence. Media access was not only encouraged, but the media was also practically inundated with information.⁵³ The unbelievable result of the FC building projects, exposed to the light of day by SouthCom’s public affairs plan, was that the FMLN, in writing, publicly embraced the American exercise as a necessary step in rebuilding the nation. United States Ambassador Alan Flanigan reported:

*. . . Representatives of the FMLN’s National Resistance Faction delivered a letter to the U.S. commander of Fuertes Caminos on November 11. The letter expresses “support and sympathy” for Fuertes Caminos and, while acknowledging “diverse ideologies,” touts “the importance of other countries participating in the development and consolidation of an authentic democracy in our country.”*⁵⁴

In El Salvador, Fetig pointed to a unified effort among both governments, both militaries, the Embassy and SouthCom as the key to his success. Planning a unified public affairs strategy, based upon known sensitivities and issues within the host nation, resulted in a campaign able to react to whatever contingency arose. Fetig described his difficulties in getting a public affairs organization set up in El Salvador:

I had to fight to get my people in there. But we media-trained all the leadership of the [engineer]

⁵⁰Foreign Broadcast Information Service, transcription of San Salvador Channel 12 television reporting at 0300 GMT, September 3, 1993. (FBIS Chiva Chiva PM 030522Z Sep 93)

⁵¹Steve Watrous, “Nobody Here but Us Roadbuilders: the Pentagon Keeps Busy in El Salvador,” The Progressive, Oct 1994, v58, n10, 32.

⁵²Foreign Broadcast Information Service, transcription of San Salvador Channel 12 television reporting at 0300 GMT, September 3, 1993. (FBIS Chiva Chiva PM 030522Z Sep 93)

⁵³Colonel James L. Fetig, U.S. Army, former SouthCom Public Affairs Director, interviewed by the author, Jan 18 1996.

⁵⁴Message report, American Embassy San Salvador to the Secretary of State (181158Z Nov 93), “Fuertes Caminos 93 Nears Completion,” Nov 18 1993.

*battalion before it went in, and we had assessed the situation pretty correctly. We got a lot of flak, a lot of resistance [from those opposed to the exercise]; they burned our flag, they did all kinds of other things, but eventually we took their game away from them. The lesson is, we understand how to do this, we just have to do it the right way, and it has to be an integrated and synergistic effort between the embassy and the military.*⁵⁵

Colombia's Ministry of Defense (MoD), by contrast, had experienced something quite different. Defense Minister Pardo recalled that in early 1993, during the joint Colombian-United States construction of a riverine outpost for the Colombian Navy at San José del Guaviare, an easy access policy had resulted in near disaster. A Colombian reporter had asked a junior ranking United States Navy Seabee what he was doing along a river deep in the Colombian jungle. The sailor replied that he was helping to "build a base," without specifying that United States forces were providing engineering assistance to the Colombian military, and soon the Colombian media was aflutter with accounts of "United States is constructing a base for the United States Marines" in the Colombian interior.⁵⁶

From this the Minister of Defense inferred that a policy of "low key" media interaction would be best at Juanchaco: when it was necessary to give details to the media, only one officer (preferably the commander) should be trained to work with reporters; low-ranking people should remain quiet.⁵⁷ Nor could that one officer count on much expertise at the headquarters of the Colombian military; there was no Colombian military public affairs plan for Juanchaco--the Ministry itself planned to deal with it. Pardo explained:

*When I became Minister there was appointed a brigadier general, for the first time [to serve a limited kind of public affairs function], in order to coordinate the job of the military engineers with the civilian development institutions. [He was not involved in the Juanchaco exercise, because] . . . Juanchaco was purely a military operation. A military decision related with the international operations, in the hands, exclusively, of the Ministry.*⁵⁸

The idea of treating *Fuertes Caminos* as purely a military operation seemed to abandon the publicly appealing notion of a humanitarian and civic assistance exercise. And the Colombian military, ironically, had great experience with its own humanitarian projects. Typically, Pardo said, ". . . [t]he people work with the military on the job. The military provides managerial jobs, the chiefs of the groups or the squads, but the people, the neighbors, are the workers in these things. So they work with the neighbors. They publicize it very much, this kind of works, locally and even nationally."⁵⁹

⁵⁵Colonel James L. Fetig, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 4 1995.

⁵⁶Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

Pardo's strategic objective seemed to be to keep the United States involved in Colombia. If the Ambassador wanted United States engineers to build in Juanchaco, that was a fine idea for Pardo; Admiral Rozo's supporting community would benefit. But this objective did not mesh cleanly with SouthCom's strategic objectives--the ideas of supporting Colombian democracy and enhancing Colombian military professionalism would have seemed superfluous, since Colombia was a longstanding democracy, and Colombia's armed forces were already highly professional, successful, and comfortable with their role in society. And Colombian society, in turn, seemed to be comfortable with them, at least compared to other Latin American nations that lived in fear of their militaries. Pardo considered the Juanchaco mission routine--so much so that he did not even bother telling President Gaviria about it.⁶⁰ The United States relationship was something he had taken great pains to nurture, and the presence at Juanchaco was a minor thing he could handle himself.

Ambassador Busby had seen Pardo work his magic time and time again in sensitive cases when United States military presence had been questioned. Counternarcotics overflights of United States intelligence-gathering aircraft, opium poppy eradications and American assistance in the search for the fugitive drug kingpin Pablo Escobar had all elicited anti-American sentiment and charges of sovereignty violation. Busby depended on Pardo's Defense Ministry each time:

*They said, look, you're here at our request, and we will protect you, and we'll take care of this. You just do the job; we'll take care of the public affairs stuff. And they handled it, and we never said a word about it. It was all taken care of, and there was absolutely no reason to believe that that wouldn't happen in this case, too.*⁶¹

So despite the other HCA public affairs experiences, messages from SouthCom coordinating public affairs guidance, and visits to Bogotá and briefings by military civil affairs, psyops, and media experts, Busby had no qualms about totally rejecting SouthCom's proposed media plan in favor of letting Pardo handle it. Any questions that came up could be answered by the Ministry. If the media showed up at the exercise site, the local Colombian commander, Admiral Rozo, would be equipped to deal with them. Moreover, Busby's staff resented SouthCom's aggressive stance toward the exercise. Ann Wells, the State Department's Colombia Desk Officer, had observed the differences of opinion between the two players, and recalled ". . . SouthCom was trying to do it all, and the hard-line stance that the Ambassador finally ended up taking was in part a reaction to the 'we know how to do these things, we've been doing them all our lives' attitude of SouthCom." The entire public affairs effort was ". . . so personality driven, and that's not just for SouthCom PA, that's our own Embassy as well. A lot of 'stay off my turf' attitude."⁶²

⁶⁰In an interview with the author on November 14 1993, Pardo stated that during the normal course of military-to-military operations, the Minister of Defense did not specifically inform the President of each individual exercise. The chief executive understood that these bilateral U.S.-Colombia operations, such as the Juanchaco exercise, occurred continually, and trusted the MoD to deal with them appropriately.

⁶¹Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

⁶²Ann Wells, former State Department Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

Even Busby's staff military representative was tarred by the controversy, since he also played a role in SouthCom as the commander of the U. S. Military Group in Colombia. Marine Corps Colonel Tom Carstens advised importing the U. S. Army South's public affairs officer from Panama to monitor the Colombian MoD's public affairs effort, but the Ambassador "absolutely forbade [her involvement]." When Carstens later suggested that the Ambassador listen to SouthCom, Carstens spoke from experience. Carstens had been Vice Director of Operations at SouthCom during the Bolivia debacle, and he told Busby what had gone wrong under circumstances similar to those he now faced with Juanchaco. Busby waved him off, remarking, "That was Bolivia."⁶³

Determined to stand his ground, Ambassador Busby realized ". . . there was a horrendous battle going on between me and the Public Affairs types up at SouthCom. . . . There was a constant back-and-forth [with SouthCom] on what we should do, and our position on it was, look, whatever you do, we don't want a bunch of military-type press coverage on this."⁶⁴

Busby, perhaps overwhelmed by the sheer scope of Fetig's planned campaign, was bewildered by some of its elements. He thought that the military PA planning, which included contingency responses to off-the-wall questions, was intended as "military-type press coverage." As it did with any military operation, SouthCom planned to issue "public affairs guidance" for use during the exercise. The guidance amounted to authorized replies by a spokesperson to any conceivable questions asked by the local citizens or media--questions that, if answered incorrectly, would tend to embarrass the United States. These possible questions and carefully thought-out answers, which were coordinated and approved through both the Departments of Defense and State, would compose a simple guide to allay a range of concerns, all of which were questions United States spokespersons had faced before.⁶⁵ Busby frowned upon the whole idea:

*[Before the exercise started, SouthCom] . . . sent a bunch of press guidance down to the Embassy which was pages and pages and pages of answers to questions that nobody had asked. Everything from, "Are these guys infected with AIDS?" to, "Are they going to be carrying weapons?" I mean, all kinds. . . . It was the normal kind of stuff that the military does, and the problem I had with all of it was that I was afraid we'd use it!*⁶⁶

Thus, in the October 29, 1993, agreement between the United States and Colombian governments authorizing the exercise, signed by Ambassador Busby and Minister of Defense Pardo,⁶⁷ the MoD was

⁶³Col Thomas R. Carstens, USMC, interviewed by the author, Oct 27 1995.

⁶⁴Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

⁶⁵Message, SouthCom Public Affairs to DoD Public Affairs (012215Z Dec 93), "Proposed Press Guidance: *Fuertes Caminos* 94-South (Colombia)," Dec 1 1993.

⁶⁶Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

⁶⁷Message, American Embassy Bogotá to Secretary of State (022110Z Nov 93), "Fuertes Caminos 94 Agreements Signed Oct 29," Nov 2 1993.

given the lead for the public affairs effort.⁶⁸

Colonel Fetig, though disappointed that his Command's battle-proven public affairs expertise would sit unused, realized that this time he was powerless to influence the PA campaign--Fetig's boss and intercessor with Ambassador Busby, General Joulwan, had been sent to Europe in mid-October to command the military forces of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Though by law SouthCom retained the authority to command and control the troops that deployed to Colombia, the Ambassador exercised primacy in the overall conduct of United States relations with the host nation, thus Busby felt the public affairs decision was entirely his.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, within the Embassy, Busby's Public Affairs Officer (who also served as the United States Information Service [USIS] director), Dr. L. W. Koengeter, coordinated a news release announcing the *Fuertes Caminos* exercise to the Colombian public. In what she described as a concession to SouthCom, the Embassy published the communiqué on December 14, 1993.⁷⁰

The announcement advised Colombians:

*By invitation of the Colombian government, military units of the United States will participate in a joint combined engineering exercise with the government of Colombia and its military forces, from December 1993 until February 1994. The exercise is called "Strong Roads 94 - South of Colombia" and includes engineering and humanitarian/civic assistance activities. As part of the exercise, United States military engineering units and Colombian government personnel will repair access roads and accomplish vertical construction of a school and a medical clinic 75 kilometers northwest of Cali, in the Valle del Cauca Department. The exercise has the approval of the Government of Colombia and of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, and is sponsored by the United States Southern Command.*⁷¹

The Embassy thought publication of the news release would keep SouthCom happy. However, Fetig's tried-and-true PA plan depended on the Embassy's release of exercise details only following an official announcement of the endeavor by the Colombian government: "host nation first, we go second."⁷² But the ground-breaking Colombian news release had not occurred. Tragically, Defense Minister Pardo

⁶⁸Message, American Embassy Bogotá to Secretary of State (131642Z Dec 93), "Draft Memorandum of Understanding/Memorandum of Agreement Between Colombia and U.S.," Dec 13 1993.

⁶⁹Title 10, U.S. Code, 164 "Commanders of combatant commands: assignment; powers and duties" [U.S. Code, 1994 Edition, Vol 3 (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1995), 411-412], and Title 22, U.S. Code, 3927 "Chiefs of Mission" [U.S. Code, 1994 Edition, Vol 11 (Washington, DC: USGPO, 1995), 1423].

⁷⁰Dr. L. W. Koengeter, former Public Affairs Director, U.S. Embassy Bogotá, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

⁷¹United States Information Service. "Comunicado de Prensa, Fuertes Caminos 94-Sur de Colombia," Santa Fe de Bogotá, Colombia, Dec 14 1993.

⁷²Colonel James L. Fetig, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 4 1995.

lay flat on his back in a Houston hospital, felled by a ruptured aorta on December 10.⁷³ With no companion message from the Colombian government, the USIS release lit the fuse for an explosion of anti-American, anti-government sentiment. Not only had the figurative fuse been lit, but the political environment had effectively been doused with gasoline in the months before.

⁷³Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995; and Ann Wells, former State Department Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

Circumstances in a country like Colombia can change 180 degrees six times between the time you approve an exercise like this and the actual date that it commences. And that was the case for Juanchaco. --Ann Wells
Colombia Desk Officer, Department of State⁷⁴

5. Colombia in December 1993: The Battlefield Prepared

Recent events in Colombia had brought great credit to President Gaviria. Under his leadership, Colombia's economy had proved itself capable of consistent growth--5 percent per year in gross national product, making it one of the strongest in the region, while reducing unemployment to 8 percent.⁷⁵ The United States Department of State sang its praises. Michael Skol, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bureau of Interamerican Affairs, gushed, "Colombia has one of the strongest economies in Latin America. Thus, . . . it is attractive to U.S. investors and traders. U.S. trade to Colombia jumped by over 68 percent in the period 1990 to 1993, due to [President Gaviria's] aggressive economic liberalization program."⁷⁶

A new constitution had been drafted, approved by the people, and entered into force in July 1991. The Medellín Cartel had been smashed, and to top it off, just two weeks before the Embassy news release, on December 2, 1993, the notorious drug lord Pablo Escobar had been hunted down and shot to death by Gaviria's troops.⁷⁷ All in all, the news would appear to be good. Yet, elements existed in Colombian society that were displeased, displaced, or disgruntled by the apparent successes, and political hay had to be made for the upcoming national elections. Congressional elections were scheduled to be held in March 1994, and a new President would be elected in May.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, as the new year approached, the political scene was described as ". . . starving for debate,"⁷⁹ and ". . . voters were yawning."⁸⁰ People

⁷⁴Ann Wells, former State Department Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

⁷⁵The World Factbook 1994 (Washington, DC: CIA, 1994), 89, and "Politics Reigns: Colombia," The Economist, Feb 12 1994, v330, n7850, 37.

⁷⁶"U.S. Relations with Colombia," Joint Hearing Before the Subcommittees on International Security, International Organizations, and Human Rights and the Western Hemisphere of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives, One Hundred Third Congress, Second Session, August 3 1994.

⁷⁷Robert D. McFadden, "Head of Medellín Cocaine Cartel is Killed By Troops in Colombia," The New York Times, Dec 3 1993, A1.

⁷⁸The World Factbook 1994 (Washington, DC: CIA, 1994), 89.

⁷⁹"Colombia's Leader Defends Presence of G.I.'s," The New York Times, Feb 10 1994, v 143, A12.

⁸⁰"Politics Reigns: Colombia." The Economist, Feb 12 1994, v330, n7850, 38.

were looking for political axes to grind, and with United States assistance, they found them.

Initially, Ambassador Busby livened things up himself with a comment immediately following the killing of Escobar. “Pablo Escobar’s death and the dismantling of the Medellín cartel is a big success for Colombia,” Busby told newsmen, “but now they should continue with the Cali Cartel.”⁸¹ Not to be outdone, acting Drug Enforcement Agency director Stephen Greene issued his own warning to Cali, noting that, now, “the full resources of the Colombian government and the United States government can be devoted to their apprehension.”⁸²

Such statements inflamed the sensitivities of Colombians—even within the government, who considered them meddling in Colombia’s internal affairs. Gaviria’s Minister of Government, Fabio Villegas, thought Busby’s statement in particular a mistake:

*Narcotraffic in Colombia, besides its international repercussions, is a Colombian domestic issue that has to be handled by Colombia. It wasn’t necessary for the Ambassador to say that, because we were going to fight Cali anyway—it was a Colombian decision to fight Cali. In fact, we were already fighting Cali. That was our policy. Don’t forget that in Colombia there are important sectors of the population who think there is too much intervention by America in Colombian issues; they don’t want to fight narcotraffic because it is an American imposition. They want to fight it because it is the right thing to do. And the only thing this sort of statement [by the Ambassador] produces is difficulties in handling the narcotraffic policy. We found it difficult to explain to the people why the Ambassador was saying that.*⁸³

The Ambassador was saying that because the Clinton administration had ordered him to push for increased action against the Cali Cartel.⁸⁴ For United States counterdrug assistance money to continue flowing into Colombia, President Clinton had to annually certify to the United States Congress Colombia’s progress against narcotrafficking, and the March certification deadline was only a few months away. The United States Assistant Secretary of State for International Narcotics Matters, Ambassador Robert Gelbard, pointed out, “. . . [h]alf of most types of U.S. foreign assistance to [drug producing] countries is withheld by law, pending the [U.S.] President’s certification [that they] . . . cooperated fully with the United States or took adequate steps on their own to meet the goals and objectives of the 1988 U.N. Convention on Drug Trafficking.”⁸⁵

American military assistance,⁸⁶ as well, was linked to counternarcotics, and Joulwan, the United

⁸¹Tracy Wilkerson, “U.S. Soldiers Mustering Controversy,” Los Angeles Times (Washington Edition), Feb 8 1994, C2.

⁸²Joseph B. Treaster, “Effort to Curb Drug Flow May Be More Difficult, Officials Say,” The New York Times, Dec 4 1993, v143, 7(L).

⁸³Fabio Villegas, former Minister of Government, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Oct 25 1995.

⁸⁴“U.S. Troops Deploying to Colombia for Construction,” Tropic Times (Panama), Dec 17 1993, 4.

⁸⁵Robert Gelbard, Opening Statement, “Annual International Narcotics Report,” U.S. Department of State Daily Press Briefing, April 4 1994, 1.

⁸⁶Indeed, U.S. assistance in general had dwindled over the past few years. Approximate figures in \$ millions:

FY	U.S. A.I.D.	Foreign Military Funding	International Military Education and Training
'91	24	47	3
'92	74	47	2

States area military commander, had also been pushing. In a posture statement to the United States Congress earlier in 1993, he declared, “While the Medellín cartel has essentially been dismantled, attention must now be turned to the Cali cartel, which is more ingrained into local society and will, in all probability, be much more difficult to eliminate.”⁸⁷

Colombia’s government resisted the appearance that it somehow would cave in to United States demands for increased action. Less than a month before Escobar’s death, The New York Times reported on Gaviria’s reaction to increased pressure: “In Colombia, which has the strongest economy of the Andean countries, President César Gaviria recently told President Clinton that Colombia would make up any cuts in American aid from its own budget.”⁸⁸

This one subject--the scourge of illicit drugs, which Colombia produced and exported, and the United States imported and consumed--seemed to dominate completely the whole official United States-Colombian relationship. Any United States military presence, then, would be weighed by Colombians in the context of the drug war; in Pardo’s words, the people were “. . . ready for the idea that the U.S. military are coming in order to help the military forces to fight against drug trafficking . . . ,” but not to accomplish any humanitarian agenda.⁸⁹ And Juanchaco’s location, so close to Cali, could hardly be seen as coincidence, especially following Busby’s statement. And again, for Pardo, the HCA benefit to the people of Juanchaco was inconsequential. He reiterated:

*We didn’t [consider it] humanitarian work, because it was very small. The change in the level of standard of living was very, very small, even in the small town of Juanchaco. . . . For us it was a military task, team building, part of the military agreement, but not related specifically with the idea of improving the living conditions--the living standards--there. If this happened, it happened as a by-product of the military exercise, but not as the main project.*⁹⁰

A United States military exercise, then, conducted for a goal other than fighting narco trafficking, but to be held close to Cali, was about to kick off within a month of Escobar’s death, and following the Ambassador’s goal of the Colombian government to get tough with Cali. Colombia’s media and public were ready for the Embassy’s news release, cocked and loaded for disbelief.

’93	27	27	3
’94	20	8	1

[Source: U.S. A.I.D. (Mar 31 1993) and DoD Security Assistance Agency (Sep 30 1994)]

⁸⁷General George A. Joulwan, U.S. Army, “Continued Engagement Needed in Southern Command Region,” Defense Issues, Vol. 8, No. 24, April 21 1993, 3.

⁸⁸“U.S. Aid Hasn’t Stopped Drug Flow from South America, Experts Say,” The New York Times, Nov 21 1993, v143, Sec 1, 10.

⁸⁹Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

⁹⁰*Ibid.*

Vilify! Vilify! Some of it will always stick.

--Beaumarchais, 1732-1799⁹¹

6. Word War I: The Battle Is Joined

When the USIS news communiqué's lit fuse touched off the Colombian public's powder charge, the visceral reaction was that of a "*gringo* invasion."⁹² The immediate picture in the media's mind was United States Marines storming the beaches of Iwo Jima, for shock value, with the specter of Vietnam thrown in for emotion. From day one of the media firestorm, the United States Army engineers involved in the FC exercise were re-christened "marines," the most pejorative term available, guaranteed to irk the Colombian psyche. The invading "marines" would violate Colombian sovereignty, the articles said, in their "real" mission to destroy the Cali cocaine cartel.⁹³ Soon thereafter, the image of "[t]he sad example of Somalia"⁹⁴ was brought to bear. A Colombian Post cartoon featured a menacing ten-foot tall "marine," armed to the grinning teeth and looming over a ragged "Cali" woman of exaggerated Negroid features, proclaiming, "We've come here to build some schools that they didn't let us finish in Somalia!"⁹⁵

The vision of a failed American military enterprise was carefully calculated to inspire maximum emotion and attention, and no one used it more quickly or more effectively than the *alcalde*, or mayor, of the Valle del Cauca city of Tuluá, Gustavo Álvarez Gardeazábal. Álvarez Gardeazábal immediately denounced the exercise as a "new Vietnam" and vowed to fly his town's flag at half mast for the duration of the exercise, in protest of this perceived violation of Colombian sovereignty.⁹⁶

If the *alcalde* of Tuluá, a well-known author and anti-government gadfly, expected the United States media to pick up on the theme, he could not have been disappointed--the editor of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch soon warned its readers to demand a review of the exercise by the Congress, "or will it wait until a soldier returns home in a body bag?"⁹⁷

⁹¹Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations (Annapolis MD: United States Naval Institute, 1966), 256.

⁹² Javier Baena, "U.S. Troops in Colombia," La Estrella de Panamá, Dec 30 1993, B3.

⁹³"U.S. Battalion to Colombia," La Estrella de Panamá, Dec 16 1993, B2.

⁹⁴"[Former Conservative President] Misael Pastrana Complains about the Arrival of U.S. [Soldiers]," El Tiempo, Dec 18 1993, 1. (Reported by message, Amassy Bogota to USIA Washington, 202256Z Dec 93, Subject: "Media Reaction--U.S. Intervention, 'Strong Roads 94' Program.")

⁹⁵ "U.S. Troops in Colombia," Colombian Post, (undated) Jan 1994, 6A.

⁹⁶ Javier Baena, "U.S. Troops in Colombia," La Estrella de Panamá, Dec 30 1993, B3.

⁹⁷"U.S. Troops in Colombia," St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Dec 30 1993, 6B.

Mary Speck, writing in the Miami Herald, bestowed upon Álvarez Gardeazábal the title of “local mayor,” implying that he was the closest thing available to a Juanchaco civic official,⁹⁸ and although in reality Juanchaco was even farther away from Tuluá (130 kilometers) than it was from Cali (110 kilometers),⁹⁹ it was extremely close on the newspaper page, and Álvarez Gardeazábal looked to all the world like the one true voice of Juanchaco’s victims.

By December 18, though Juanchaco would not see an American engineer deploy for eleven more days, the Colombian media had already developed every major theme that would haunt the exercise through March of 1994: the exercise’s violation of national sovereignty, the government’s dubious justification for permitting the foreign military activity, the President’s violation of the constitution in allowing it, and the government’s withholding of details and refusal to admit the true mission of the “marines.” And through it all the media never bothered itself with the simple facts USIS presented them four days earlier in the December 14 news release. The reality of the situation proved to be that “[n]o one here believes they would bring all those foreign troops for a simple civic exercise. The location is too strategic. We are not naive enough to swallow such a coincidence.”¹⁰⁰

Since, “no one” could believe the Embassy communiqué, and the Ministry of Defense had initially issued no details, the public and media were left to their own ingenuity to determine what was “really happening.” With Pardo unavailable, Armed Forces Commander (and acting MoD) General Ramon Emilio Gil Bermudez found himself suddenly awash in controversy. Not fully informed before Pardo’s illness,¹⁰¹ General Gil was singularly unprepared for the tempest that followed the announcement that a horde of Americans was on its way to Cali Country.

The December 28 arrival of the 46th Engineer Battalion’s 16-man advance party, led by task force commander Major Abernathy, was duly reported as, “Marines arrive kicking their way in.”¹⁰² The Americans, soon billeted at Malaga Bay, were promptly accused by the press of having “hailed down the Colombian flag,” while the earth moving equipment and motor vehicles in their accompanying barges became “artillery and war equipment.”¹⁰³

General Gil’s reaction was to request that the Embassy ensure *all* the Americans were gagged. The Embassy was to say nothing, the troops arriving at Juanchaco were to say nothing--everything was to be

⁹⁸Mary Speck, “Mission in Colombia Generating Protests,” Miami Herald, Jan 1 1994, 3A.

⁹⁹“*Republica de Colombia, Mapa Politico Administrativo*,” 1:1,500,000 scale. Bogotá: *Instituto Geografico “Agustin Codazzi*,” 1989.

¹⁰⁰Pamela Constable, “Here, U.S. Presence is Jarring,” Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb 6 1994, 11.

¹⁰¹Rafael Pardo Rueda, Former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author Nov 14 1995.

¹⁰²“Paparazzi Caught Some ‘Gringos’,” La Prensa, Dec 29 1993, 1.

¹⁰³“They Hauled Our Flag Down,” La Prensa, Dec 29 1993, 1.

referred to the Ministry of Defense. Deputy Chief of Mission John Craig notified the Departments of Defense and State.¹⁰⁴ The Department of Defense Public Affairs Office, in coordination with the Department of State, objected, stating that it would be ridiculous now to deny or refuse to confirm what had already been issued by USIS, and suggested “. . . that an open policy is the only one which protects us from the sort of disinformation this exercise has already experienced,” and proposed a limited commentary by sources within the United States.¹⁰⁵

Fetig, meanwhile, had sent at the outbreak of the Colombian media frenzy a message from the SouthCom staff, reemphasizing the lessons the Command had learned in Bolivia and El Salvador, and begging the Embassy to pursue with the MoD a policy of openness with the Colombian public, offering to help put the host nation “out in front and . . . pro-active.” This approach, Fetig noted, “. . . has generated reams of positive publicity for the United States and helped advance U.S. foreign policy.”¹⁰⁶

The Embassy could not have been eager to confront the acting Minister of Defense just now with a recommendation to countermand his just-issued PA guidance. By this time in early January 1994, General Gil at the Ministry had found that Juanchaco had not been the only area in which he had been less than fully informed. Pardo recalled:

The commander in chief of the armed forces, General Gil, was not completely informed; he . . . [didn't] have the sensitivity to certain aspects of the U.S. operation . . . In [a briefing], somebody asked him, “General Gil, how many U.S. troops are in Colombia at [this] moment?” . . . He said 20, or 30, or 40. The next day, again, the question was asked of him, “How many American advisors are all over the Colombian territory?” And he gave another answer. A hundred, or 80. Not significantly different, but different than the one he gave the day before. So this sort of contradiction introduced a certain kind of suspicion in some journalists, who started to ask why the general was talking about different figures, “Are there any groups of American advisors who are hidden by the Ministry? What is happening?”¹⁰⁷

Suddenly the presence of any American serviceman or woman, anywhere in Colombia, who was not involved in the “humanitarian” operation, was taken as proof that the HCA story was a lie. The longstanding missions of the reported 250 Americans already in Colombia on counterdrug, military liaison, and training assignments were called into question by the national media, and, again, the United States press jumped into the fray with gay abandon.¹⁰⁸ For authoritative reference, Facts on File reported that, despite

¹⁰⁴Message, American Embassy Bogotá, “Public Affairs Strategy for Fuertes Caminos ‘94 in Colombia,” Dec 30 1993.

¹⁰⁵Message, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs) (110930Z Jan 94), “Public Affairs Strategy for Fuertes Caminos 94 in Colombia,” Jan 11 1994.

¹⁰⁶Message, SouthCom Public Affairs (172304Z Dec 93), “Pro-active Public Affairs for Fuertes Caminos Exercise in Colombia,” Dec 17 1993.

¹⁰⁷Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author Nov 14 1995.

¹⁰⁸“Bogota Describes Activities of U.S. Troops in Colombia,” The New York Times, Jan 13 1994, 8.

initial claims of a humanitarian exercise, American troops were really, after all, in Colombia to fight the Cartels.¹⁰⁹ And just in case the drug war angle failed to excite American readers, the Washington Times placed the troops practically under siege in “. . . a village surrounded by leftist rebel bases . . .”¹¹⁰ Throughout the hemisphere, fertile imaginations worked overtime to produce creative coverage, sampled below in Figure 4.

By the end of January, Busby and Koengeter were painfully aware that “low key” was not exactly working well, and reevaluated the situation. Without Pardo, the Defense Ministry’s public affairs function had clearly failed them. After all, Koengeter recalled in frustration,

*. . . they were supposed to be out front on this. And the facts are that they were not trained to do public affairs, U.S.-style, and they did not pick up on some things we had hoped for them to do. . . . We went to the [Colombian] military public affairs people, we called on them, we tried to get organized together, and so on, but also [from then on,] we were much more active in the Embassy, in the public affairs role . . . I think the main point here is that there was an assumption of capability in the Colombian military, in the public affairs sectors, to match their ability in the military strategy sectors that, in my professional judgment, they just simply did not have.*¹¹¹

Nor had SouthCom kept quiet during the furor. Fetig had tried to influence the Embassy through messages and indirect appeal through the United States Military Group, but without a CINC to work directly with Ambassador Busby, his suggestions again were rejected. At one point, Colonel Carstens politely requested that SouthCom leave him alone—he was taking enough heat from the Ambassador and Deputy Chief of Mission as it was.¹¹²

Nevertheless, all the heat eventually produced some light. Koengeter, Busby, and staff began work on a proposal for a more aggressive PA plan. In early February they had worked out with the Ministry of Defense a PA plan that even SouthCom’s PA office pronounced “generally sound.”¹¹³ The challenge

¹⁰⁹“U.S. Presence Protested,” Facts on File, Feb 3 1994, v54, n2775, 70.

¹¹⁰“U.S. Operations Anger Villagers in Colombia,” Washington Times, Jan 6 1994, 12.

¹¹¹Dr L.W. Koengeter, former American Embassy Public Affairs Officer, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

¹¹²SouthCom Public Affairs memorandum, “Conversation with Col Carstens, MILGP/CC Bogota,” Feb 8 1994.

¹¹³Memorandum, SouthCom Public Affairs Director (SCPA), “Embassy Public Affairs Plan for FC94-CO,” Feb 4 1994.

Figure 4. Media Quotes, Disinformation Campaign Against Juanchaco

Valle's drug traffickers, afraid of what might happen, have unleashed an aggressive campaign among political sectors against the surprise U.S. presence on Colombia's soil to exacerbate nationalist feelings and thus discredit and relocate the mission.

--El Tiempo, Jan 8 1994

Outright Lies

- "The real objective of the troops is to combat narcotraffickers" (*La Estrella de Panamá*, Dec 16 1993)
- "U.S. marines beat up journalist Jorge Hernan Sanchez" (*La Prensa*, Dec 29 1993)
- "They hauled our flag down" (*La Prensa*, Dec 29 1993)
- "Four U.S. ships with artillery and war equipment arrived in Malaga Bay" (*La Prensa*, Dec 29 1993)
- "The U.S. government gave the Colombian government \$700 million to allow 122 U.S. marines to build a school and health center in Juanchaco" ("TV Today" Newscast, Bogota *Inravisión* Channel 1, Jan 2 1994)
- "They will build a radar network" (*La Prensa*, Jan 4 1994)
- "The gringos bivouacked in Juanchaco have enough weaponry to seize half of Colombia" ("TV Today" Newscast, Bogota *Inravisión* Channel 1, Jan 16 1994)
- "Colombian military officials acknowledged that U.S. troops previously said to be on a 'humanitarian mission' were in fact helping the Colombian government track guerrillas and drug traffickers" (*Facts on File*, Feb 3 1994)
- "Their mission was to bury toxic waste in Malaga Bay" ("TV Today" Newscast, Bogota *Inravisión* Channel 1, Feb 28 1994)

Outlandish Insinuations

- "[Washington's decision to invade Colombia would turn] the region into a 'new Vietnam'" (*Crítica Libre*, Dec 17 1993)
- "The school or health center could very well be used as a camouflage to establish a base or a fort here in the region" ("National News" Broadcast, Bogota *Inravisión* Channel 1, Dec 29 1993)
- "Presence of U.S. soldiers delays surrender of Cali cartel chiefs" (*Crítica Libre*, Dec 31 1993)

Outrageous Insults

- "U.S. humanitarian actions usually end up bad (look at Somalia)" (*El Tiempo*, Dec 26 1993)
- "U.S. soldiers dressed as Sisters of Charity" ("National Newsmen" newscast, Bogota *Inravisión* Channel 1, Dec 28 1993)

- “The mission could well be part of now-discredited U.S. drug-interdiction efforts in Latin America. Will it wait until a soldier returns home in a body bag?” (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, Dec 30 1993)
- “Gringos are a type of chicken pox, an incurable disease like AIDS” (El Nuevo Siglo, Feb 14 1994)

I know, too, of cases that have occurred in the past when people, sometimes as the result of slanderous information and sometimes merely on the strength of suspicion, have become frightened of each other and then, in their anxiety to strike the first before anything is done to them, have done irreparable harm to those who neither intended nor even wanted to do them any harm at all.

--Clearchus of Sparta: To Tissaphernes
of Persia, after Cunaxa, 401 B.C.¹¹⁴

7. Polls Apart: Points of View

The media blitz caught everyone off guard by its scope and severity. Facts seemed to be irrelevant, the important thing being the opportunity to further various agendas in the face of an information vacuum. Getting little in addition to the facts presented in the USIS news release, which “no one believed” anyway, not being allowed to question the United States and Colombian troops working near Juanchaco, and being fed contradictory and sparse data by the Defense Ministry, the Colombian and American media had a field day, spurred on by disparate interests on the political and criminal scene.

Politically, Juanchaco was the perfect opportunity to energize the congressional and presidential campaigns, to polarize the public, and to clear up issues lingering from the 1886 Constitution that had been carried into the 1991 document by default. The presidential field (even for hopefuls of Gaviria’s own Liberal Party) was wide open, since by law Gaviria was limited to only one term in office. In fact, Gaviria was accused of allowing the Juanchaco furor “to snowball” because he was seeking another office entirely--that of Secretary General of the Organization of American States.¹¹⁵ Nevertheless, the personal attacks on Gaviria were perhaps not as vicious as they would have been against an incumbent running for reelection.

The candidates seemed to seek the moral high ground, eschewing the more sensational positions taken in the tabloid press. (Sample political commentary illustrated below, Figure 5.)

¹¹⁴Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations (Annapolis MD: United States Naval Institute, 1966), 246.

¹¹⁵Tracy Wilkerson, “U.S. Soldiers Mustering Controversy,” Los Angeles Times, Washington Edition, Feb 8 1994, C2.

Figure 5. Sample Commentary, Presidential Candidates

- Humberto de la Calle, Liberal Party: The Colombian people were fed half-truths. [*EL Tiempo*, Feb 6 1994]
- Rodolfo González García, Liberal Party: Harassment of an *EL País* photographer by officials was a travesty. [*Estrella de Panamá*, Dec 30 1993]
- Rodrigo Marin Bernal, Conservative Party: The government's explanation is satisfactory. Colombia should receive anyone who comes to help. [*Estrella de Panamá*, Dec 30 1993]
- Gabriel Melo Guevara, Conservative Party: The exercise was a tremendous error on the part of the national government. [*Estrella de Panamá*, Dec 30 1993]
- Antonio Navarro Wolf, M-19 Party: U.S. should give Colombia the money to do the civic projects on its own. [*EL Tiempo*, Dec 29 1993]
- Enrique Parejo González, Liberal Party: There is no reason to complain about U.S. soldiers coming to Colombia to carry out civic works. [*Estrella de Panamá*, Dec 30 1993]
- Ernesto Samper, Liberal Party: Gaviria was tricked into accepting the exercise, either by the U.S. government or the Colombian Defense Ministry. [*EL Tiempo*, Feb 6 1994]

Popularly, however, the government's authority to approve the presence of foreign military troops was called into question in the absence of the prior approval of the Colombian Senate. President Gaviria claimed that such previous approval was unnecessary, based upon agreements long in force under which United States and other foreign troops had deployed to Colombia for many years:

It is clear that the government believes the presence of U.S. troops or those of other countries that enter Colombian territory to provide technical and training assistance and that observe international agreements does not violate the Constitution.

The legal base for this type of exercise is the Inter-American Reciprocal Assistance Treaty (TIAR) which is currently in effect. It was signed by Colombia and approved by the Congress of the Republic in 1947. This treaty was followed by the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement signed on 17 April 1952. These types of military missions are carried out in Colombia based on legal documents that have been in effect since the middle of the century.

As for the joint military engineering exercise taking place in Juancho--in which neither military personnel [sic] nor warships are participating--there is a memorandum of understanding and an agreement signed by Defense Minister Rafael Pardo and U.S. Ambassador Morris Busby on 29 October 1993. These instruments lie within the framework of, among others, the TIAR.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶“Gaviria Interviewed on U.S. Troop Presence,” *EL Tiempo*, Jan 21 1994, 1A, 8A.

The government had used these two documents, TIAR and the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement, to approve United States-Colombian bilateral exercises within the Republic and its territorial seas, as well as to justify United States military roles in the counternarcotics campaign. The political opposition maintained that the new Constitution, in its Articles 173 and 237, required specific senatorial approval for each deployment of American troops. If the Senate was not in session, Article 189 required the President to instead obtain the permission of the Council of State (*Consejo de Estado*), Colombia's highest administrative tribunal. Additionally, they claimed, the 1952 United States-Colombian agreement had not been properly ratified by the Congress, and therefore was without effect.¹¹⁷

Gaviria's government steadfastly argued that the articles stipulating congressional approval were carried over from the early days of the Republic, applied only to troops from one country transiting Colombia to attack another country, and did not apply to the temporary stationing of troops within Colombia.

A literal--and narrow--interpretation of the Constitution was required to back the President. Article 173 stated that it was the right of the Senate "[t]o permit the *transit* of foreign troops *through* the territory of the Republic"[emphasis added].¹¹⁸ Strictly speaking, it did not even address the temporary stationing of military forces. The article dealing with the Council of State's role was similarly fuzzy. Article 237 gave the Council the right to nullify government decrees as unconstitutional in certain conditions, and, similar to Article 173, to be consulted on the movement of troops *through* the territory, but, again, did not specifically address the status of troops on duty *within* Colombia. It carefully mentioned the stationing of ships or aircraft, but left out soldiers.¹¹⁹

Early in January, attorney and law professor Hernando Holguin Pelaez filed suit with the Attorney General's office demanding Gaviria's prosecution for treason and violation of the Constitution.¹²⁰ Next, a senator and several congressmen followed suit, and Attorney General Carlos Gustavo Arrieta ordered his deputy for the armed forces, Maricio Fajardo, to take engineering and construction experts, go to Juanchaco,¹²¹ and investigate.¹²² On January 18, the president of the Council of State, Amado Gutierrez,

¹¹⁷"Arrival of U.S. Troops Continues Without Justification," *Crítica Libre* (Panama), Jan 2 1994, 18.

¹¹⁸*Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991, Título VI, Capítulo 4, Artículo 173. "Son atribuciones del Senado: ...4. Permitir el tránsito de tropas extranjeras por el territorio de la República."*

¹¹⁹*Constitución Política de Colombia, 1991, Título VIII, Capítulo 3, Artículo 237. "Son atribuciones del Consejo de Estado: . . . 2. Conocer de las acciones de nulidad por inconstitucionalidad de los decretos dictados por el Gobierno Nacional, cuya competencia no corresponda a la Corte Constitucional. 3. Actuar como cuerpo supremo consultivo del Gobierno en asuntos de administración. . . . En los casos de tránsito de tropas extranjeras por el territorio nacional, de estación o tránsito de buques o aeronaves extranjeros de guerra, en aguas o en territorio o en espacio aéreo de la nación, el gobierno debe oír previamente al Consejo de Estado."*

¹²⁰"They Denounce Gaviria for Treason Against the Country," *Hoy* (Panama), Jan 5 1994, 19A.

¹²¹In his situation report for January 16, Major Abernathy advised USARSO Headquarters of the team's progress: *Over the past few days there has been a commission investigating our work and whether we are here for a peaceful purpose. From what*

sent Gaviria a letter asking for a complete report to explain his actions.¹²³

After all was said and done, little was accomplished by the legal furor, as Pardo later related in his memoirs:

The President answered [the letter from the Council of State], and after weeks of study and a plenary session, this judicial organ decided that the explanations submitted by the government were not sufficient. The Council of State disagreed with the conventional and traditional interpretation concerning the character of military exercises and asked the House of Representatives to investigate the President for a possible violation of . . . the constitution . . .

*. . . The attorney general also began a disciplinary investigation and found that the traditional interpretation of military cooperation had been met.*¹²⁴

Looking back, Pardo found the opposition to President Gaviria by the Council of State perplexing. During the campaign against Pablo Escobar, the Council had sent a letter of concern to the President asking under what authority he had requested U. S. military assistance in the form of intelligence-gathering overflights, technical assistance, and so on. The President had replied that the 1952 Mutual Assistance Agreement was his authority, and that in his opinion congressional approval had not been required. The Council had tacitly agreed by not further questioning Gaviria. However, in the case of Juanchaco, they were much more adamant in their opposition, on constitutional grounds.¹²⁵

Pardo pointed out that the original intent of the 19th century Constitution was to prevent troops from entering South America through the isthmus of Panama, which Colombia owned at the time. This provision was kept verbatim in the 1991 Constitution, and a paragraph was added to include transient ships and planes. In Pardo's opinion, President Gaviria's claim that the article did not apply to foreign troops invited for various purposes by the Republic of Colombia only made sense; otherwise, he would have to kick out all the military bands, attachés, ships on port call, resupply aircraft, *ad infinitum*.¹²⁶

To explain the Council's refusal to accept the President's view, Pardo cited the Cali Cartel and plain politics. The media flap over Juanchaco had drawn attention to the very mechanism Gaviria had used to get United States assistance against the cartels in the first place. Perhaps the Cali Cartel's lawyers influenced the Council so they could identify the legal instruments used to support United States military

we have seen of their report, they will report that we are here building a school and a clinic and not engaged in other activities.

¹²²“They Investigate U.S. Soldiers,” *Panamá América*, Jan 14 1994, 17A.

¹²³“Council of State Asks the Government to Explain Presence of U.S. Troops,” *Crítica Libre* (Panama), Jan 19 1994, 25.

¹²⁴Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, unpublished draft of his memoirs, November 1995, 164-165.

¹²⁵Rafael Pardo Rueda, Former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*

assistance for counterdrug operations and defeat them in the future.¹²⁷

On the other hand, Pardo felt the Council of State was angry with Gaviria because of a perceived loss of power following the adoption of the 1991 Constitution. In the new document, some of the Council's former roles were dropped. Additionally, the method for accession into the Council changed--originally, a departing member named his own replacement; now, a prospective member had to go through a nomination and approval process overseen by the legislative and judicial branches of government. The Council of State blamed Gaviria for allowing this loss of autonomy and influence, and sought revenge through the Juanchaco controversy, alleging complicity in the hegemonic designs of the United States.¹²⁸

Indeed, United States media coverage of HCA exercises in general, including both the El Salvador and Juanchaco deployments, was characterized by a distrust of United States military motives. The theme seemed to be that the United States had a huge military machine left over from the Cold War that was looking for roles--any roles--to justify its existence.¹²⁹ And at worst the United States media, like their Colombian counterparts, cast doubt upon the true nature of the work at Juanchaco. Pamela Constable's insinuation in the Philadelphia Inquirer was clear, "While U.S. and Colombian officials *insist* the troops are engaged in an innocent project . . ." [emphasis added].¹³⁰

But if any of the diverse interests involved had good reason to fear whatever was going on near the little village on the Pacific Coast, the narcotraffickers did. Ambassador Busby later acknowledged:

*The timing was bad on it; we didn't realize that at the time, but it came right after we had successfully pursued and caught, and sent to his great reward, Pablo Escobar. And then when we sent a group of what press began to call "marines" down into Juanchaco, which of course was very close to Cali, I think we truly frightened the cartel. I think they honestly believed that this was the second phase of a master plan, and they were going to be the targets this time. And I think they began to manipulate the press for their own purposes, but also because I think they were afraid. I think they generally were scared.*¹³¹

Busby's sentiments were echoed by the State Department's Colombia desk. Ann Wells put herself in the mindset of the cartel leaders, musing:

Where is this exercise occurring? It's occurring just over the mountain range from the city of Cali, in the same province, the Valle del Cauca Province. If I want to drive a wedge in cooperation between the U. S. government and the Colombian government, which helped to get Pablo Escobar, and which is now going to turn its full wrath on my organization, this is one of the sensitive points that I can try to shove my wedge in. So I'll buy

¹²⁷*Ibid.*

¹²⁸*Ibid.*

¹²⁹Steve Watrous. "Nobody Here But Us Roadbuilders: the Pentagon Keeps Busy in El Salvador." The Progressive, Oct 1994, v58, n10, 30(4).

¹³⁰Pamela Constable, "Here, U.S. Presence is Jarring," Philadelphia Inquirer, Feb 6 1994, 11.

¹³¹Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

*off anybody who will go down there and be an eyewitness about what the nefarious actions of the U. S. government are, and what their true hidden agenda is.*¹³²

Back at SouthCom headquarters, Colonel Fetig felt that not only were the narcotraffickers behind the media attacks, but that they had perhaps even implemented a contingency plan to react to the U.S. presence. Fetig was troubled by

*. . . how quickly the Colombian opposition jumped on Juanchaco and were able to make a case that it was something other than what it was, and my own personal belief was always that it was narco inspired all the way down the line. We heard some of the shopworn arguments used throughout the region; we were prepared for the old leftover Soviet [-style] disinformation campaign that was about dumping toxic waste or nuclear waste . . . We did not see those [themes] to the extent that we thought we would. We saw something far more sophisticated . . . Virtually, [it was almost as if someone had had a plan on the shelf, waiting to use it].*¹³³

The narcotraffickers, in Wells' opinion, were also unwittingly aided by genuinely patriotic Colombians. "There was that side of an argument which you cannot, in any way, say was fueled by the Cali Cartel. But it did create the element of suspicion that allowed the Cali Cartel to capitalize tremendously on that, and yes, there were people who were down there specifically to report on the events in such a slanted way as to fuel that kind of suspicion."¹³⁴

Equally suspicious was the moniker "civic *assistance*" within the HCA title for the exercise. It was too easily confused with another program used during 1960s and 70s counterinsurgency efforts, "civic *action*," which had been part of the United States recipe for helping Third World countries fend off communist aggression. Even the United States Embassy and SouthCom themselves, as well as United States press articles, often used the term "civic *action*" when referring to Juanchaco and similar exercises.

The idea of "civic *action*," so close to "civic *assistance*," must have conjured up for many Colombians and Americans the image of an imperialistic American nation striving to stamp out revolution, a picture dutifully described in the political language of the period by Rosa Gomez Lleras and Juan Valdez in their 1972 monograph, *La Intervención Militar Yanky En Colombia* (Yankee Military Intervention in Colombia):

. . . These programs [dealing with internal security and emphasizing military "civic action"] apply the experiences gained by the North Americans during their genocidal aggression against the Vietnamese people. In general, the objectives of the program are to reinforce the capacity of the police and paramilitary forces to establish "law and order" and to counteract the subversion and insurgency of the populations. . . . The plan is to employ the army, equipment, and expertise in projects of social and economic development, especially in those

¹³²Ann Wells, former State Department Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

¹³³Colonel James L. Fetig, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Jan 18 1996.

¹³⁴Ann Wells, former State Department Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

areas affected by violence, presently or in the recent past. . . . Projects of long duration include the construction of highways, schools, and medical clinics. . . . The hope is to deprive the existing bandits or guerrillas of present and future cooperation on the part of the rural population.¹³⁵

Gomez's and Valdez's guerrillas, who had lasted through the fall of Communism and were alive and well in the 1990s, capitalized on the outcry that accompanied FC 94 in Colombia. In attempts perhaps to destabilize the government during the media-induced crisis, the ELN (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional*-National Liberation Army) dynamited several United States-related targets during the course of the exercise,¹³⁶ such as a Mormon church, a Coca-Cola bottling plant, an English language center, and a travel agency.¹³⁷ In the saddest event of all during the exercise, and also arguably media-induced,¹³⁸ the FARC (*Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia*--Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) kidnapped two American missionaries in what it claimed was a protest against the United States presence in Juanchaco.¹³⁹ But after the exercise was over and the troops gone, the FARC demanded ransom and later killed the missionaries.¹⁴⁰

But all the protestors were not guerrillas, politicians, or tabloid journalists. Juan Tokatlian, head of the International Studies Center at the University of the Andes in Bogotá, blamed the chief executive: "President Gaviria can say public opinion was manipulated, but there were sectors of the population who simply wanted to understand what was going on, which is totally logical and justifiable. . . . His handling of this was awful."¹⁴¹

Otherwise well-meaning citizens were driven by strictly nationalistic, if not anti-imperialistic, interest, asking questions such as,

¹³⁵Rosa Gomez Lleras and Juan Valdez, *La Intervención Militar Yanky en Colombia*. Bogotá: Ediciones Frente Social, 1972, 13, 21, 22.

¹³⁶"Guerrillas Bomb U.S. Targets," *Hoy* (Panama), Feb 4 1994, 18.

¹³⁷"U.S. Troops Fail to Win Colombia's Hearts or Minds," *Miami Herald*, Mar 2 1994, 3A.

¹³⁸One suggestion that appeared early on in the media was that since the Colombian government was idly standing by during this "invasion from the North," the defense of the nation's sovereignty now fell to the guerrillas of the FARC and ELN. To infer from this, any guerrilla activity targeted against Americans would be justified on the grounds of defending the national sovereignty. An example of such comments appeared in Panama City's *Crítica Libre* in the article, "Colombian Politicians Criticize the Presence of North American Soldiers in Cali," Dec 17 1993, 32. Later, on the front page of *La Prensa*, Feb 4 1994, under the headline, "Terrorist Wave in Medellín," the tabloid reported, "According to police, the attacks are taking place because the guerrillas want to take over the defense of the country's sovereignty."

¹³⁹"Rebels in Colombia Kidnap 2 U.S. Missionaries," *The New York Times*, Jan 20 1994, A-4.

¹⁴⁰"Bodies of 2 Americans Found in Colombia," *The New York Times*, Jun 21 1995, A8.

¹⁴¹Tracy Wilkerson, "U.S. Soldiers Mustering Controversy," *Los Angeles Times*, Washington Edition, Feb 8 1994, C2.

. . . “Why are 152 foreign troops entering our soil, to begin with? Who gave them permission to do that and why does somebody have permission to give to them, without going to the Senate and without coming to us, the people, to ask us if we want them there?” There was . . . on the part of true, legitimate, nationalistic--but not criminal--Colombians an element of “why on earth does the U. S. government have to come down and do for us what we can do for ourselves?” Now, the fact that Juanchaco has not been looked at twice by anybody from the central government is beside the point. Their idea was, “Well, what’s so special about this place? Why didn’t you go down to the Amazon?” When they’re thinking about where can the U. S. government help the Colombians, there are a whole lot of places where you can choose to go. We chose Juanchaco because it was easy to get supplies to, for one thing, and it provided the kinds of questions we wanted our engineers to work on.¹⁴²

¹⁴²Ann Wells, former U.S. State Department Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

Essayons! (*Let's Try!*)

--U.S. Army Corps of Engineers motto

8. True Perspective: Engineers On the Front Lines

The engineers, themselves, and their work were all but lost in the maelstrom of controversy. When Major Mark Abernathy, the 46th Engineer Battalion operations officer and commander of the Juanchaco task force, arrived at Cali with fifteen other unit members on December 28, they were slapped into the reality of Colombian politics by accusations that they had beaten a photographer and harassed the local citizenry.¹⁴³ As they made their way to Malaga Bay, the first of four equipment barges sent from the United States and Panama was just reaching the port. While Abernathy reported through military channels the safe docking of the lowly seaborne transports--which contained building supplies, trucks and a bulldozer--the opposition daily *La Prensa* alerted the country to the arrival of “[f]our U.S. ships with artillery, war equipment, land transport and supplies, . . . to build a little school in Juanchaco.”¹⁴⁴

Last to arrive, and bringing the total manpower to approximately 150, was the main body of troops, consisting of Captain Jason Tanaka and his “Bravo” Company of the 46th, who had been ferried by helicopter from an intermediate stop in Panama on January 4. The lack of roads and bridges across rivers, streams and ravines between Juanchaco and Malaga Bay required that the engineers and their equipment, based at the Malaga Bay Naval Base, were loaded onto waterborne landing craft and floated south along the peninsula to Juanchaco, where they disembarked to begin work (see map, Figure 6, p. 44). On January 5, when they motored to the worksite, Major Abernathy recalled, Colombian journalists were

*. . . waiting on the beach at Juanchaco when we showed up the very first day to take our equipment from where we were staying at the Colombian naval base. They were there on the beach, we landed, and we looked like a bunch of Americans storming the beach. . . . Our heaviest thing, and that was the first thing that came off the LCU, the landing craft, was a bulldozer. So what they got a picture of was this bulldozer coming off the LCU with a couple of Colombian soldiers hanging off the sides, providing local security.*¹⁴⁵

For purposes of television, however, even pictures of a bulldozer with Colombian soldiers was too tame, so instead they used stock footage of the Persian Gulf War, complete with American soldiers in desert camouflage uniforms and night vision goggles, to depict this “invasion of Colombia.”¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile,

¹⁴³“Paparazzi Caught Some ‘Gringos,’” *La Prensa*, Dec 29 1993, 1.

¹⁴⁴“They Hauled Our Flag Down,” *La Prensa*, Dec 29 1993, p 1. Reported by message, American Embassy Bogota to USIA Washington (302312 Dec 93), “Media Reaction--U.S. Intervention, ‘Strong Roads 94’ Program,” Dec 30 1993.

¹⁴⁵Major Mark H. Abernathy, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 12 1994.

¹⁴⁶Memorandum, SouthCom Public Affairs (SCPA), “Embassy Public Affairs Plan for FC 94-CO,” Feb 4 1994.

newspapers in the neighboring Republic of Panama, which had suffered an invasion of the real kind in 1989, adopted Juanchaco as a popular theme. In Panama City's anti-American *Crítica Libre*, images of armed Desert Storm troops were used to illustrate the Colombian articles, along with a frequently-run file photo of a soldier in a U.N. beret unloading a giant C-5 cargo aircraft.¹⁴⁷

Nevertheless, worrying about their public image was not the first thing on the minds of Major Abernathy and Captain Tanaka as they set to work with their troops. They had, indeed, been aware of the controversy, but were excited about starting their task. The troops were upbeat, happy to be on a deployment, and thrilled with the prospect of helping out the folks of Juanchaco.¹⁴⁸ Yet their first emotion, media aside, was to be mild disappointment.

One of the main benefits of the exercise was to be their chance to work with Colombian engineers; by their arrival, they believed, the Colombians would have improved the road from the beach to give them access to the project sites. Their expectation, based upon the exercise Memorandum of Agreement, was that they would be primarily involved with the school and clinic, perhaps helping the Colombians put finishing touches on the road.¹⁴⁹ The main body of Colombian engineers, meanwhile, would be working on the Juanchaco airfield, which was not a part of the FC exercise. (See worksite diagram, Figure 6, p. 44.)

The Colombian engineers had accomplished but little. Abernathy conceded, "They [at least] had somebody working there. One Colombian engineer had one [bull]dozer, and they had common laborers working, and all they had done was push some dirt around."¹⁵⁰ That being the case, Bravo Company's engineers spent the first three days blading the road and scooping earth from the foundation sites for the school and clinic.¹⁵¹ Then, on the fourth day, torrential rains began that would continue throughout the month, turning the earth spongy and the just prepared areas into mudholes, and frustrating the troops.¹⁵²

Heavy equipment could not move on the earthen road, and supplies could not be brought to the construction sites. Except for those working to surface the road, Captain Tanaka remembered,

¹⁴⁷"Presence of U.S. Soldiers Delays Surrender of Cali Cartel Chiefs," *Crítica Libre* (Panama), Dec 31 1993, 15, and "Disagreement on the Presence of American Soldiers in Colombian Territory," *Crítica Libre* (Panama), Jan 27 1994, 34.

¹⁴⁸Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1994, and Major Mark H. Abernathy, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 12 1995.

¹⁴⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰Major Mark H. Abernathy, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 12 1995.

¹⁵¹They found another unanticipated task when an overloaded footbridge near the beach collapsed on Jan 6, spilling 13 Juanchaco inhabitants into a ravine. TF 46 sought and received permission to rebuild the bridge for the community, and the task force's doctor offered to treat the minor injuries that resulted from the incident. [Source: Daily Situation Report, TF 46 Commander's Comments, Jan 6 1994.]

¹⁵²Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1994.

*We were just puddling around pretty much all of January, just trying to get access to the site. About the last week in January, we realized we had to get moving, because by that time we knew that our mission time wouldn't be extended, so we started walking stuff in. We did hand excavations [for the buildings'] . . . foundation. The ground there was still soupy, because it was just so saturated after the January rains, but we thought if we could just get a foundation and try to get it dried out as best we can, because once you get your concrete foundation in, you just move along from there. So we started walking stuff in, hand excavating the foundation, and then by the time we were about ready to start placing concrete for the foundation, we had an access road going out to the site to where we could get our trucks to place stuff. Throughout, it [the road construction] never stopped, because we continually had to maintain that thing, just because of the rain.*¹⁵³

If the engineers were surprised and frustrated by the January deluge, the inhabitants of Juanchaco were not. The locals had assisted, along with department and national officials, in the design of the school and clinic, but had not been consulted as to the weather to be expected on the Pacific coast of Colombia in January. Tanaka found that despite what the global climatic charts said,¹⁵⁴ the natives knew that January was going to be rainy, and “. . . sure enough, in January we got record rainfall for that region. . . . The mission still stays the same, you've got to get done by the end of February. It doesn't matter that you got record rainfall in January and couldn't start your construction until the end of January, so now you have half the time you thought--the mission still stays the same.”¹⁵⁵

A comparatively dry February found Abernathy, Tanaka and troops with 28 days remaining before they had to be finished, packed, and out of Colombian territory--and they still had a school and a clinic to build. To add to the compressed time schedule problems, the contractor whose inflated charges had annoyed SouthCom's budget planners found he could not deliver high quality construction materials to the site.

Tanaka's troops and the local citizens helped him:

Although this Colombian contractor was responsible for delivering the materials, he used the local population to help him move the materials, because it was in his contract that he would deliver the material on-site. And initially, everything was being left down on the beach. So I told him, this is not good; it's your job to get the material on-site. I realized that we had all the trucks [on the Juanchaco side of Malaga Bay], so I let him use our trucks to move the bricks and blocks and whatnot, but he had to hire the folks out of the local community to do

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴In 46th Engineer Battalion Operations Order (OPORD) 1-94, “*Fuertes Caminos (S) - Colombia*,” Appendix 1 to Annex B, the International Station Meteorological Climate Summary for Buenaventura (34 km distant) reported an average of only five days of rain for January, and listing January and February as by far the two driest months of the year. According to Tanaka, TF 46 experienced only four *dry* days in January 1994.

¹⁵⁵Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1994. The 21 inches of precipitation in January, 1994 [Memorandum, COL Terry Rice to MG John Thompson, Feb 3 1994], does seem abnormally high, compared with a January average of 13 inches measured in Buenaventura, during the years 1970-1990 [World WeatherDisc: Climate Data for the Planet Earth. Seattle, WA: WeatherDisc Associates, 1994].

*manual labor.*¹⁵⁶

To make matters worse, when the materials finally got to the site, Tanaka found out that the concrete building blocks were faulty. Trying to build a square building with not-quite-square blocks was “a challenge.”¹⁵⁷

The first week in February, the SouthCom engineers reported the project fourteen days behind schedule (improved from seventeen days) with the task force working two ten-hour daily shifts to catch up, and began formulating options for completing the project. They dismissed out of hand the idea of bringing in more troops, considering it politically unpalatable. They briefly considered constructing a smaller-than-designed building, but then they would be breaking faith with the Juanchaco villagers, who were the reason for their coming in the first place. That left the idea of staying longer, which was also considered a political near-impossibility, but the engineers were willing to propose anything in order to complete their mission.¹⁵⁸

By February 9, Task Force 46 had only made up one day on the schedule. Now thirteen days behind and with no hope of finishing by the end of the month, they formally requested a two-week extension through USARSO, which also desired “. . . to complete the mission to standards of quality specified in our agreement with the government of Colombia and the U.S. Embassy.” The Task Force’s parent unit, back at Fort Rucker, and FORSCOM ratified the extension.¹⁵⁹ With the uproar that an extension would cause in Colombia, however, staying past the end date was unthinkable--Ambassador Busby said, “Over my dead body”¹⁶⁰--and the proposal died in the SouthCom staffing process.

The task force continued its Herculean effort to acquit itself as best it could. Not only were the troops working ten to twelve hours on the work site, but also the boat ride back and forth from the Malaga Bay naval base kept them on duty another hour or so on either side of the backbreaking labor in Juanchaco. On one such excursion, Private First Class Carlos Gonzales leapt from the deck of the landing craft on which he was commuting to the work site, and saved from drowning a little girl being carried out to sea by the tidal current.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1994.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸Memorandum, SouthCom Command Engineer (SCEN), “Progress at *Fuertes Caminos* 94 South Colombia,” Feb 3 1994.

¹⁵⁹USARSO Deputy for Operations message, “*Fuertes Caminos* 94 (South) - Colombia Project Status” (CDR USARSO/SOOP-OP 092100Z Feb 94), Feb 9, 1994.

¹⁶⁰Morris D. Busby, Former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

¹⁶¹In an interview with the author on Dec 12 1995, Major Abernathy reported that for this action Private (now Specialist) Gonzales was awarded the Soldier’s Medal, the highest U.S. Army peacetime award for heroism involving voluntary risk of life. [Department of Defense. Armed Forces Decorations and Awards (DoD GEN-40A). Washington, DC: American Forces Information Service, 1992, 7.]

Nor were lifesaving and building Task Force 46's only helpful activities. The Americans built playgrounds for the kids, they helped clean the beaches, and the citizens responded protectively to their "marine occupying force." When hostile journalists confronted the soldiers, the *campesinos* of Juanchaco held demonstrations of their own, waving humble signs that said, "You are welcome here, Americans."¹⁶²

Upon the arrival of packing day in late February, although they were pleased to have both structures up, the engineers were sorely disappointed that they wouldn't be able to place the finishing touches. Captain Tanaka tried to soothe their egos:

*What I tried to tell them was, we've got at least a structure the [people of Juanchaco] can start using today, if they wanted to. It doesn't have all the bells and whistles that we were supposed to have in there before we left, but what got done in one month was pretty amazing. . . . We would've wanted to stay to finish, but what we've done is more than what we thought we would have done at the end of January.*¹⁶³

As for himself, though, Tanaka was frustrated and exhausted:

*Honestly, I was very tired. Physically and emotionally, I was tired, and I was about ready to come home, but there's that sense of not getting everything done. And when I left I had this picture of this Colombian naval lieutenant, and it became his responsibility to finish up the construction. I saw him with some of his Colombian Marines trying to get a start on some of the finish work, and I really felt bad. . . . I thought we could have finished [it ourselves] with a couple more weeks.*¹⁶⁴

Electrical and plumbing finish work was all that remained of the construction effort when the troops loaded their equipment on barges and left Colombia on February 28. Major Abernathy, too, was frustrated by the weather, environment, and political situation that prevented his task force from achieving total mission success:

*My only complaint about it was that we didn't completely finish it. We had the shell up and the structure up, but we did not finish all the plumbing and hanging all the windows, and that was completed by the Colombians, and what really bothered me was that we couldn't have a week or two extra in the country to finish up what we were doing.*¹⁶⁵

The troops of Task Force 46 left the Colombians \$6700 worth of materials to finish the job to

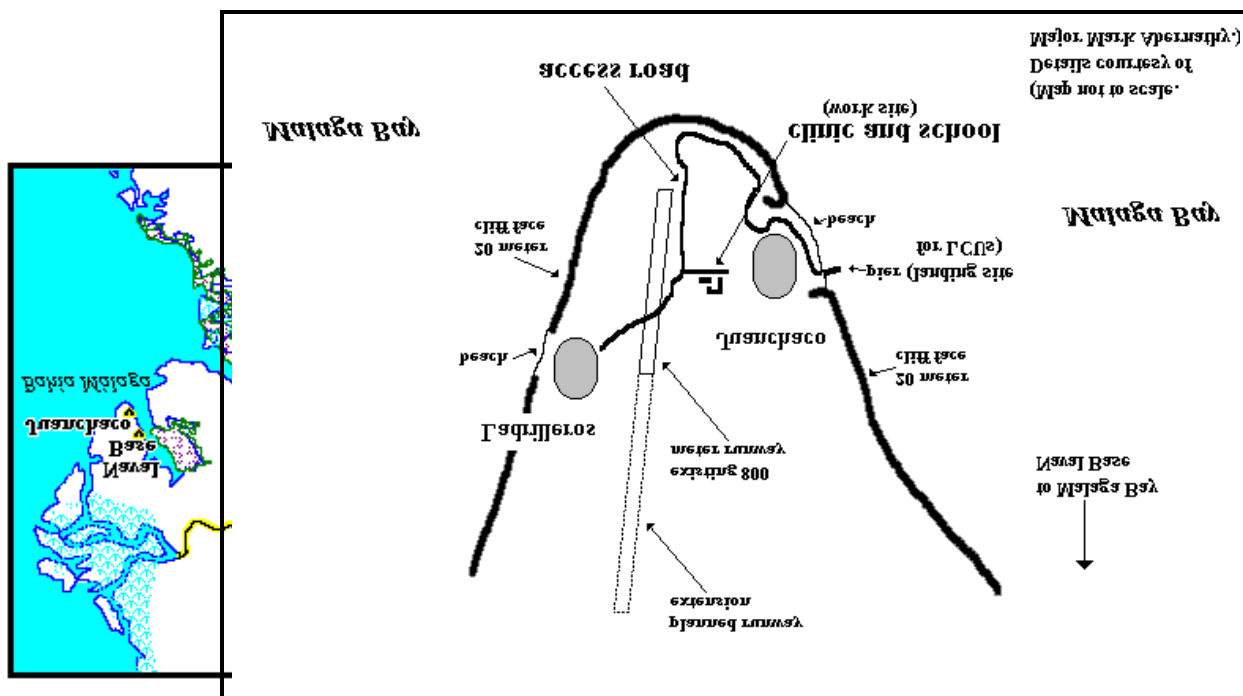
¹⁶²Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

¹⁶³*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁶⁵Major Mark H. Abernathy, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 12 1995.

specification,¹⁶⁶ and then they said goodbye to the beaches of Juanchaco, not realizing that they would continue to inspire sensational reporting in the Colombian media for some time to come.



¹⁶⁶Memorandum, SouthCom Operations Directorate (SCJ3-DDC), "Call from Capt Allen on FC(S) 94," Feb 25 1994.

I know not whether more is to be dreaded from streets filled with soldiers accustomed to plunder, or from garrets filled with scribblers accustomed to lie.

--Samuel Johnson: The Idler, November 11, 1758¹⁶⁷

9. Word War II: The Media Battle Continues

Media coverage of Task Force 46's presence demonstrably affected the attitude of Colombians. After 43 days of disinformation, the National Advisory Center (*Centro Nacional de Consultoría*) announced the results of a poll taken among "a vast sector of the Colombian population" to determine their feelings on the American exercise. Seventy-three percent of respondents "flatly rejected the foreign presence," 69 percent agreed that the exercise violated the nation's sovereignty, and only 10 percent believed that the soldiers were "building schools and roads."¹⁶⁸ The overwhelming rejection clearly pointed out the need for a change in the direction of the PA campaign.¹⁶⁹

The Embassy's new and improved PA plan, drawn up in coordination with Defense Minister Pardo upon his return from the hospital, included many of the elements of SouthCom's initial plan, and Colonel Fetig seemed relatively pleased with it.¹⁷⁰ According to the plan, the Ambassador scheduled a series of visits to "friendly" media outlets, including newspapers, and radio and television stations. SouthCom forwarded the Embassy copies of videotape footage of previous FC exercises, and in turn the Embassy provided the tape to the television stations still using Gulf War images of night vision goggles and tanks. In addition, SouthCom was even allowed to videotape the Juanchaco operation itself, and provide that footage to the media through the Embassy. Finally, a few of the soldiers at Juanchaco were allowed to talk to the media, under Colombian MoD supervision.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷Robert D. Heinl, Jr., Dictionary of Military and Naval Quotations (Annapolis MD: United States Naval Institute, 1966), 236.

¹⁶⁸"Disagreement on the Presence of North American Soldiers in Colombian Territory," *Crítica Libre* (Panama), Jan 27 1994, 34, and Paris A.P. in Spanish, 1906 GMT Jan 26 1994, reported by FBIS, Chiva Chiva PM (271212Z Jan 94), "Poll Shows Colombians Reject Presence of U.S. Troops," Jan 27 1994.

¹⁶⁹Outright cancellation of the exercise was not seriously considered by officials at the Embassy, SouthCom, and State Department. This point was driven home quite firmly in interviews with Ambassador Busby, Colonel Fetig, Ms Wells, and others. In Wells' words (interviewed on Oct 31 1995), *[W]e agreed to do this, and there are lots of good reasons why perhaps it should not go on, but probably the best reason why it should continue is that we have given our word that we would do it, and [the Colombians] accepted the offer, and to support, and we have an obligation to come through on that. Otherwise, the power that that would have given the press, and the trafficker-controlled press, particularly, to dictate the terms of our bilateral relationship would have been tremendous.*

¹⁷⁰Memorandum, SouthCom Public Affairs Director, "Embassy Public Affairs Plan for FC94-CO," Feb 4 1994.

¹⁷¹*Ibid.*

SouthCom, however, was still not accepted as a PA equal. Aside from the allowances in the new Embassy plan, the Colombia country team wanted no more input from Panama. Fetig recalled sharp exchanges with Embassy people in February. He was told he was “. . . butting into their business; a nuisance. . . . We’re in Colombia, you don’t understand Colombia, we know what we’re doing down here. Do not send any more messages, it’ll just make it worse.” So Fetig reluctantly stopped sending messages to the Embassy.¹⁷²

The changes in attitude were not all on the Embassy’s part. Back in Washington, the State Department had fielded tough questions during its daily morning press briefings, and began to pay much closer attention to events farther south. As one official remembered it, the Department of State was in “. . . constant, close consultation with the Embassy, and everything the Embassy said was cleared here [at State] . . .” The Colombia Desk Officer, Ann Wells, found herself continually under the gun handling the situation, and she had daily contact with the Embassy in Bogota. “That occupied the desk officer’s time almost exclusively for that period in which it was a hot issue,” the official recalled.¹⁷³

Pardo painfully realized that his absence had certainly contributed to the initial problems of public opinion that the Juanchaco operation faced,¹⁷⁴ and he, too, worked hard to reverse the situation. In coordination with the Ambassador, he arranged a “media day” visit of journalists and the public to the Juanchaco exercise site the second week in February. Pardo studied the information SouthCom provided on the FC series of exercises, including history in other countries and the costs associated with such exercises, as well as the past efforts of other engineering groups, such as Navy Seabees, in Colombia. On February 9, Pardo worked his magic at Juanchaco.¹⁷⁵

On “media day,” Abernathy and Tanaka became known to the press as *los jefes* (“the bosses”), and were scrutinized by the media. Abernathy recalled:

[T]he Minister of Defense came down, and there was a large contingent of Colombian and other press there, and they were taken to the sites, and I was identified and questioned at that time. I got the impression that [the reporters] were wanting us to say the wrong thing, that they could blow it out of context; that they were just waiting to misquote somebody. And once they did that, to make something about it. All the questions seemed to be kind of leading-type questions, wanting you to say something that might be construed as hostile or anything. There was some interest [in the buildings themselves], but the questions they would ask sometimes, like, . . . “Is it true that these buildings are going to be SouthCom’s new headquarters? This is just the start of SouthCom since they’re being kicked out of Panama? Is it going to move down here? Are you sure this is really a school? Why are you building a school here?”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷²Colonel James L. Fetig, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 4 1995.

¹⁷³State Department Official, interviewed by the author on background, Apr 3 1996.

¹⁷⁴Former Minister of Defense Rafael Pardo Rueda, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

¹⁷⁵Memorandum, SouthCom Public Affairs, “Embassy Assessment, Latest Media Coverage of FC94,” Feb 10 1994.

¹⁷⁶Major Mark H. Abernathy, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 12 1995.

Captain Tanaka thought the openness came none too soon, and wished he could have dealt honestly with the media from the start. Realizing that his remarks could always be misconstrued, he observed, “Folks could have screwed it around and said, ‘No, that’s not a school, that’s a barracks.’ But so what? They probably did that anyway, so what have we got to lose by talking to them?”¹⁷⁷

Nevertheless, media reaction to this new policy, perhaps in vindication of SouthCom, perhaps because of Pardo’s persuasive power, was immediate and profound. On the next day, February 10, editorial columns throughout Colombia betrayed new-found feelings of self doubt and guilt, now that journalists had heard--and seen--the truth of Juanchaco. Typical of these was an editorial by Enrique Santos Calderon on the leading daily *El Tiempo*, “It Is Better To Be Clear:”

If from the beginning the country is spoken to in a clear and sincere manner about the presence of the U.S. military personnel in Juanchaco; if what they’ve come to do is explained without going around the issue, or if it’s even presented by saying that they have come to help us fight drug trafficking and terrorism, I am sure that there would have been an overwhelming current of support for the arrival of the battalion of military engineers.

*But when you use banal (superficial) explanations; when for the sake of comfort you jump over legal steps; when contradictions and inconsistencies start to appear, a climate of suspicions and criticism is created. Nobody, even if you are totally in favor of the United States’ military presence, likes to be told half-truths or have the pill sweetened before hand. What was missing from the very beginning was transparency . . .*¹⁷⁸

Pardo’s new transparency did not cure all the ill feeling, nor quiet most of the critics; however, it did mark a turning point, and, little by little, media coverage of the Juanchaco HCA exercise became more objective.¹⁷⁹ Constitutional issues were not allayed, nor were concerns of sovereignty, but at least facts were reported in many, though not all, the newspapers. As a final slap at the departing Americans, the opposition tabloid *La Prensa* and “TV Today” had saved a veritable gem of creativity. These media operations were both owned by the Pastrana family, whose patriarch, Misael, was a former President of Colombia, and whose heir apparent, Andrés, was a leading presidential candidate, and they threw out the final accusation against Task Force 46.¹⁸⁰

On the last day of the 46th Engineer Battalion’s redeployment, February 28, “TV Today” reported

¹⁷⁷Captain Jason Tanaka, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1994.

¹⁷⁸Reported by message, American Embassy Bogotá to USIA Washington (112331Z Feb 94), “Media Reaction--U.S. Presence in Colombia, ‘Strong Roads 94’ Program--Part 2, 2/10 Editorials on President Gaviria Replies to the Council of State,” Feb 11 1994.

¹⁷⁹The change in media attitude did seem remarkable. In the author’s unscientific survey of 162 newspaper, television, and radio events covering Juanchaco between Dec 16 1993 and Mar 4 1994, only fifteen could be described as favorable to the exercise. Amazingly, seven--nearly half--appeared in only the 24 days following Pardo’s “media day,” while the other eight were spread out over the 55 days before it.

¹⁸⁰Message report, American Embassy Bogotá to USIA Washington (011717Z Mar 94), “Media Reaction--U.S. Presence in Colombia, ‘Strong Roads 94’ Program--The Weekend Wrapup,” Mar 1 1994.

that “their mission was to bury toxic waste in Malaga Bay and that they may return in 20 days to complete their work, . . . which now explains the real reason for their presence in our country. . . . [M]eanwhile, we visited the school and health center that are only half finished. Only the roof and walls confirm that U.S. soldiers were indeed there at least trying to build those facilities.”¹⁸¹

The newspaper *La Prensa*, continuing its disinformation campaign to the bitter end, followed up with a story carrying Admiral Rozo’s remarks denying the Pastrana family’s own made-up toxic waste tale.¹⁸² But finally, at least as far as Abernathy and troops were concerned, the media shots fell short.

¹⁸¹“TV Today” Newscast, Bogota *Inravisión* Channel 1, 0130 GMT, Feb 28 1994. (Reported by message, FBIS Chiva Chiva 280335Z Feb 94, Subject: “U.S. Troops Rumored to Bury Toxic Waste in Malaga Bay.”)

¹⁸²Message report, American Embassy Bogotá to USIA Washington (021455Z Mar 94), “Media Reaction--U.S. Presence in Colombia, ‘Strong Roads 94’ Program,” Mar 2 1994.

It was a good damned idea, no matter what anybody says. We all ended up sort of wounded and bloody walking off the battlefield from this, but it was originally a good idea, and we stayed there and did it. . . . And it was an interesting experience.
--Ambassador Morris D. Busby¹⁸³

10. Aftermath: Policing the Battlefield

Tanaka's colleague, the Colombian naval lieutenant, and the Colombian engineers put the finishing touches on the clinic and school in about a month after the United States soldiers left Juanchaco. The citizens had been eagerly awaiting the facilities since mid-February. As the political furor settled, *Cromos* magazine reported, the people of Juanchaco looked to their children's future:

*. . . While the President defended himself, the school already had a principal: Wilfrido Carabali Valencia is walking through the construction site, calculating whether the 57 students will fit in the four classrooms, the two sets of bathrooms, the faculty lounge, and the principal's office. The clinic already has a doctor, a dentist, and a head nurse . . .*¹⁸⁴

Colonel Carstens, the United States Military Group Commander, had assigned one of his own troops--a Navy engineer--to monitor the Colombians' completion of the projects. Thereafter, Carstens sought periodic updates on the facilities. Nearly two years later, he stated that both buildings were serving the townspeople, and that the access road was in still in good shape.

*The clinic is occupied, it works two or three days a week. Doctors come in from Cali. It is staffed by nurses and run by the government, so there is some government presence there. It's well used by the community. The school is so well used they run two shifts through there. That's a real success story. The Colombian Army has about finished the runway, the Army engineers. So, it's all working out . . .*¹⁸⁵

At least the goal of providing tangible assistance to the Juanchaco people was fully met by the exercise. Other goals set before the exercise, however, did not work out quite so well. (Figure 7, below, is a repeat of a figure presented earlier in the text.)

¹⁸³Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

¹⁸⁴"Juanchasco II," *Cromos*, Feb 21 1994. (Reported by message, American Embassy Bogota to USIA Washington, 021455Z Mar 94, Subject: "Media Reaction--U.S. Presence in Colombia, 'Strong Roads 94' Program.")

¹⁸⁵Colonel Thomas R. Carstens, USMC, Commander of the U. S. Military Group, Bogotá, interviewed by the author, Oct 27 1995.

Even though the Government of Colombia, by the mere presence--the logistically smooth arrival, stay, and departure--of TF 46, had successfully exercised with United States forces, the objective of teambuilding could not have been viewed favorably by anyone outside of the Defense Ministry. However, through FC the government had improved the living conditions for Malaga Bay's civilian employees, and with the access road, was well on the way to providing the proper infrastructure for an influx of tourists. The runway, which was still under construction, would see a continued government presence in the area, albeit without any Americans.

The Embassy, among the Americans involved, had lost the most. The bilateral relationship as the Colombian people saw it had suffered, and America's "face" in Colombia, outside of Juanchaco itself, had been ravaged as if by a bad plastic surgeon. On the other hand, there were the unquestionable improvements the exercise had provided for the people of Juanchaco and Ladrilleros.

Figure 7. Divergent Objectives at Juanchaco

- Government of Colombia:

- ✦ Conduct military teambuilding with the United States
- ✦ Improve government access to the area
- ✦ Support naval base workers living in or near Juanchaco
- ✦ Build local infrastructure

[Source: Interviews with former MoD Rafael Pardo, Oct 20 1995 and Nov 14 1995]

- United States Ambassador:

- ✦ Strengthen United States-Colombian relationship
- ✦ Develop a neglected part of Colombia
- ✦ Enhance United States image in Colombia
- ✦ Assist people of Colombia (humanitarian action)

[Source: Interview with former U.S. Ambassador Morris Busby, Dec 8 1995]

- United States Southern Command:

- ✦ Train Army engineers in austere environment
- ✦ Assist people of Colombia (humanitarian action)
- ✦ Demonstrate United States resolve in the region
- ✦ Strengthen democracy in accordance with Strategic Objectives (Fig. 2)

[Source: Message, SouthCom Public Affairs (012215Z Dec 93), "Proposed Press Guidance: *Fuertes Caminos*"]

For SouthCom, which had sought austere training for its engineers, the results were mixed. The 46th Engineer Battalion had received tough training, no doubt, and they had unquestionably helped the local people, but they had not truly worked side-by-side with either the Colombian military engineers or the citizens of the area; thus it was hard to say that they had directly influenced allies by their example as professional soldiers in a democracy. Nevertheless, their efforts profoundly impressed all the Colombians who watched them. The Colombian military raved about their work ethic, their dedication, and their

discipline,¹⁸⁶ while Valle del Cauca's Governor Carlos Holguin was amazed at their accomplishments compared to those of his own nation. Upon visiting the site in late February 1994, Holguin observed, "We have the experience near Puerto Merizalde, where we worked three years constructing a hospital and it is not yet finished, and here the project is almost done in two months."¹⁸⁷

Though the loose end of the construction goal was neatly tied by the Colombian engineers after the departure of Task Force 46, there remained others, still dangling from the Embassy, SouthCom, and the Colombian government all the way back to the planning stages of *Fuertes Caminos*. All had seen the exercise as a way to broaden engagement outside of the counternarcotics arena, and in this they had failed to set a viable precedent. Moreover, even within the military-to-military contact objective, SouthCom had looked upon it as a military exercise with a laudable civic assistance benefit, while the MoD had only considered it "standard military activity" under the bilateral agreements. Although anyone could argue that the HCA outing had benefited Juanchaco, everyone seemed to agree that a *Fuertes Caminos*-like effort would not soon be tried again. Rather than sort out the problems and seek resolution, everyone agreed HCA in Colombia should be forgotten--Juanchaco was too painful a memory. SouthCom canceled a follow-on HCA exercise in Colombia for fiscal year 1994, and two that had been scheduled for 1995.¹⁸⁸

In Washington, having already taken a look at what happened when FC had been "rubber stamped," Ann Wells, the Colombia Desk Officer, reported a change in the State Department's attitude as well:

*We made the decision to not approve any more major military exercises for the time being in Colombia. It is too volatile a situation there; it exposes our guys to tremendous security risks. I just held my breath every morning before I went in to work; I was really fearful for those people the whole time they were there.*¹⁸⁹

Former Defense Minister Pardo concurred, remarking that Juanchaco ". . . was the first and the

¹⁸⁶One such article heaping praise on the soldiers while casting doubt on their stated mission was "The Marines Know How to Radar," *La Prensa*, Jan 4 1994, 1. Reported by message, American Embassy Bogota to USIA Washington (042300Z Jan 94), "Media Reaction--U.S. Intervention, 'Strong Roads 94' Program."

¹⁸⁷"The Marines Do Not Finish Constructing the School," *El Tiempo*, Feb 26 1994, 8D.

¹⁸⁸Message, SouthCom Director of Operations (SCJ3 141410Z Sep 94), "Proposed Cancellation of FY 95 HCA Projects," Sep 14 1994.

¹⁸⁹Ann Wells, former Department of State Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

only operation of this kind. . . . It will be the last one, too.”¹⁹⁰

Commanders or senior military officials can no longer get away with a “no comment” answer regarding American troop use . . . Ignoring the media does not make them go away--it just forces them to contact alternate sources for their stories. . . . While commanders must be concerned about operations security (OPSEC) when soldiers’ lives are at risk, we must find a good balance between OPSEC and the public’s right to know.

--LTG Hugh Shelton and LTC Timothy Vane, U.S. Army

¹⁹⁰Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

11. Some Lessons Learned: Support to Prevent or Win Future Battles

Despite that the Juanchaco HCA exercise may have been ultimately one of a kind in Colombia, it nevertheless offered a plethora of lessons for planners in future applications. Most participants agreed that the Juanchaco exercise had taught powerfully what *not* to do during an HCA exercise. The State Department, for example, learned not to “rubber stamp” their permission for military exercises without checking the socio-political context in the host nation.¹⁹² The Defense Department (including SouthCom) learned that they could have the greatest public affairs plans, officers, and civil affairs and psyops teams in the world, but unless they could sell their ideas to the ambassador, they might as well lock them up in a safe as expect to use them in an exercise in a foreign country. SouthCom and the Embassy both learned that they should in the future carefully cultivate their mutual relationship, together observing changes in the socio-political climate as planned exercises neared execution. An exercise like this had to be a team effort. Despite the fact that United States Code separated the duties and responsibilities of United States civil and military authorities in foreign countries like Colombia, effective civil-military United States teamwork was required to coherently advance United States foreign policy. In exercises hosted by a foreign country, as well as in all United States military operations other than war,

*... assignment of political and military control to a single individual in the theater of operations is impossible. Because mutual understanding and consensus must be reached without resorting to a single individual making all the decisions unilaterally, the importance of close communication and coordination between the military and political leaderships is paramount.*¹⁹³

Regardless of their personal feelings, Busby and his staff learned that other points of view must be considered, and that military, host nation, and Embassy principals had to come together and develop a joint, combined, coordinated plan for securing political and popular support for the exercise. The overwhelmingly significant lessons, everyone agreed, thus fell into the realm of public affairs.

The Colombian people, from their national, departmental, and local governments, down to the citizens in the big cities and the *campesinos* in rural areas, must be informed about any foreign forces

¹⁹¹Lt General H. Hugh Shelton, U.S. Army, and Lt Colonel Timothy D. Vane, U.S. Army, “Winning the Information War in Haiti,” *Military Review*, Vol LXXV, No. 6, Nov-Dec 1995, 3.

¹⁹²In a background interview with the author on Apr 3 1996, a State Department official addressed the State Department’s lessons learned from Juanchaco: “Our problem was the internal problem of not being properly vetted within the department, that it had become . . . something that got through rubber stamped, without anybody looking carefully at it. So our internal coordination problem is how do you prevent that from happening.”

¹⁹³Jennifer Morrison Taw and John E. Peters, *Operations Other than War: Implications for the U.S. Army* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1995), 18-19.

roosting in their midst; and the effort to inform had to be a unified effort.

That moral of the story was no surprise to Colonel Fetig at SouthCom:

*The lessons are that you have to have a unified effort, and you have to have a gameplan and an understanding before you do it, as to what you're going to do, what it means, and who's going to do what to whom. The lesson I took away from that is that when we'd go in to one of these countries, we'd go in with a package. We understand how to do this, we just have to do it the right way, and it has to be an integrated and synergistic effort between the Embassy and the military.*¹⁹⁴

Back at the State Department, Ann Wells agreed:

*Overall, I think what it teaches is that there can't be any isolation of who handles what; I think you need to set up a press team of all the parties involved and I think everybody has to agree as to what gets told when, and by whom.*¹⁹⁵

A joint, combined public affairs strategy would have to inform and solicit support on two levels: political and popular. The civilian agencies were discovering something that the military officers had had hammered into their brains throughout the military careers: what the Prussian General Carl von Clausewitz, writing in the 19th century, described as the “paradoxical trinity of war,” and involved the *people*, the *commander and his army*, and the *government*.¹⁹⁶ Although it dealt with warfare, the paradoxical trinity also applied to most uses of military forces--something Colonel Rice himself had even mentioned in a 1992 *Military Review* article.¹⁹⁷ It required developing a theory that maintains a balance “. . . like an object suspended between three magnets.”

The first two parts of the trinity, the *people* and the *military*, could be linked through the goodwill generated by the openness of a proper PA campaign, assuming the effort had been preceded by proper work in the *government* area--appropriate diplomatic agreements. The *government* piece, political support, could only be obtained by the Ambassador and his country team, thence the host nation government, and it had to consist of more than simply the Defense Minister's enthusiasm and signature on a memorandum of agreement. Although President Gaviria and Minister Pardo argued (apparently successfully in the end) that Congressional support was not strictly and legally required, they learned from the media furor that the approval of the Senate would lend credibility to the operation, and that perhaps the public would now expect it. Even within the executive branch of government, Pardo realized that exercise

¹⁹⁴Colonel James L. Fetig, U.S. Army, interviewed by the author, Dec 4 1995.

¹⁹⁵Ann Wells, former State Department Colombia Desk Officer, interviewed by the author, Oct 31 1995.

¹⁹⁶Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 89.

¹⁹⁷Terry L. Rice, “Forging Security Through Peace,” *Military Review*, April 1992, 20.

approval in the future must be drawn from the President himself and the rest of the cabinet.¹⁹⁸ Before he left office as Defense Minister, Pardo changed internal ministry procedures for United States deployments to ensure that the President and the Council of Ministers will always be informed of deployment plans. Unfortunately, the role of the Colombian Congress in the formal approval of military exercises is still unsettled.¹⁹⁹

Though not specifically addressed as a lesson learned by any of the top-level Colombian decision makers after the Juanchaco exercise, it seemed clear that much of what tolerance existed within the Valle del Cauca Department was due to the efforts of Valle Governor Carlos Holguin Sardi. Holguin, whose constituents benefited directly from the exercise, was one of the few favorable, although seldom heard because of the popular controversy, voices commenting on Juanchaco.²⁰⁰ This experience unequivocally demonstrated that in similar future endeavors, departmental and local government support should be sought as part of the political strategy for United States deployments.

Political strategy, they learned, had to be complemented by a public affairs strategy to gain popular approval before the exercise could succeed. Pardo, noticing from his hospital bed that something was amiss at Juanchaco, returned to Bogotá in February, determined to develop the missing strategy to be used in future operations. He vowed that for the “next time” a United States-involved exercise or operation kicked off, the operation would be fully explained to the public. He added that the media would henceforth be invited to the particular site, and would be hosted by a designated public affairs officer,²⁰¹ an idea SouthCom had advocated all along, but one rejected by the MoD and Embassy until nearly the end of the Juanchaco exercise.

Busby later described as a major failing his unresponsiveness to the ill-will generated by a lack of a coherent public affairs strategy:

¹⁹⁸President Gaviria himself remarked, “The lesson we have to learn . . . is that each of these operations . . . could originate from the Presidency, so that the President, with the Security Council or the cabinet, is the one who makes the mature decision.” From an article in the daily *El Tiempo*, Feb 8 1994, reported by message, American Embassy Bogotá to USIA Washington (101733Z Feb 94), “Media Reaction--U.S. Presence in Colombia, ‘Strong Roads 94’ Program--The Council of State Speaks,” Feb 10, 1994.

¹⁹⁹Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

²⁰⁰Holguin, if not the most polished advocate of the exercise, at least gave it his honest consideration. In a Jan 3 1994 television interview on Bogota’s “Caracol’s 0600-0900” Newscast, he noted:

[T]hey are restricted to operating exclusively in the zone of Juanchaco and Ladrilleros, which is an isolated and solitary area which cannot be reached except by sea. ...[T]his makes it easy to see that they are coming only and exclusively for what the document or agreement between the two governments states. ...I said since the beginning that someone tried to make a mountain out of a molehill. ...I suppose the national government has obviously abided by all the precepts of the Constitution and the law.

[Reported by FBIS Chiva Chiva PM, 031629Z Jan 94, Subject: “Governor Assures Agreement Limits U.S. Troop Activities,” Jan 3 1994.]

²⁰¹Rafael Pardo Rueda, former Minister of Defense, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Nov 14 1995.

*[I]n retrospect, what we, the Americans, should have done, we should have been a little more active; we should not have gone in with a full-scale media blitz, and psyops and all of that stuff, but we probably would have been better off if we had said something. We probably would have been better off if we had, at some point, said, “This is absolutely ridiculous, this is crazy.” And we didn’t do that. And I would say to you today that that was probably a mistake. I do not believe that we should have gone in with a full-scale media blitz, I think that would have been a terrible mistake. At the point at which the whole thing began to go out of control, we should have done something a little better. . . . If I wanted to throw rocks at myself and beat my breast, I would say I should have recognized earlier that it wasn’t going that well, and [the Colombian MoD public affairs people] weren’t going to be able to pick up the slack. And I should have stepped in and been more aggressive.*²⁰²

But Fabio Villegas, Gaviria’s Minister of Government, disagreed. An expanded role by the United States Embassy in the public affairs campaign probably would not have helped improve the misunderstandings of Juanchaco. He felt that the time for the Embassy to help with public affairs was during the planning stage. Once the Americans and Colombians had gotten together to figure out the best way to inform the public, the execution of the plan at the national level should always be the prerogative of the host nation:

*[T]he whole exercise had to be explained by Colombia. The Government of Colombia had to be able to explain to the Colombian people about the purpose of the exercise, what the legal framework was, and once you had the people in some way against the whole operation, the intervention of the American Embassy was worse. Nobody was going to believe them.*²⁰³

In the final judgment, it is Colombia, the host nation, which in the future must decide when and how to share information with its people. Since it had not shared it for *Fuertes Caminos*, the HCA exercise at Juanchaco had been a surprise to Colombians in general, and specifically to some of the Juanchaco villagers. The surprise for Colombia resulted in a huge polemic. For Juanchaco it resulted in a school, clinic, road, and eyes opened to an appreciation of the United States soldiers. The loss of future United States engineering exercises is, ultimately, a loss to the poor, underdeveloped regions of the nation and their inhabitants, exemplified by one of Juanchaco’s community leaders, who noticed, “Wherever Americans go, there is life.” For all of his lifetime there had existed only a trail to connect Juanchaco to the outside world, but “[t]he Americans started work, and within six hours, there was a road.”²⁰⁴ With its new infrastructure and quality of life improvements, Juanchaco could now take its place in Colombia’s future.

An editorial in *El Tiempo* entitled “The Invasion” summed up an exasperated Colombia’s feeling as the furor died down:

²⁰²Morris D. Busby, former U.S. Ambassador to Colombia, interviewed by the author, Dec 8 1995.

²⁰³Fabio Villegas, former Minister of Government, Republic of Colombia, interviewed by the author, Oct 25 1995.

²⁰⁴ From an article in Bogotá’s second leading daily, *El Espectador*, Jan 20 1994, quoted in message, American Embassy Bogota to USIA Washington (241436Z Jan 94), “Press Summary--The Presence of U.S. Forces in Colombia,” Jan 24 1994.

*Sovereignty wasn't harmed, blood wasn't spilled, and the visitors didn't commit any abuse against the countrymen who watched them work with curious eyes and from whom there wasn't a single cry of protest. There were rather outbursts of endearment for the tall, blond, blue-eyed soldiers who stood out in contrast to the dark skin of the Juanchaco inhabitants. Let us hope that in the future, the civic-military collaboration grows, and that those who cry out in favor of a false nationalism have the decency to be quiet. Uncle Sam's boys came, they worked, and they left. Is there a reason to complain about that?*²⁰⁵

Yet complain they did, slamming the door to future HCA exercises, at least for the foreseeable future. *Fuertes Caminos* was an opportunity squandered, for all but the villagers of Juanchaco.

²⁰⁵Reported by message, American Embassy Bogotá to USIA Washington (282322Z Feb 94), "Media Reaction--Editorial Provides Wrap-Up to U.S. Presence in Colombia, 'Strong Roads 94' Program," Feb 28 1994.

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