

# 16 AMERICANS DEAD

## General Is in Hiding but His Loyalists Seize at Least 11 Hostages

By **ANDREW ROSENTHAL**

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Dec. 20 — About 10,000 American troops backed by helicopter gunships and overwhelming firepower took control of much of Panama today. But after installing a new Government sympathetic to Washington they had not achieved a major objective: capturing Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega.

American officials said that in the broad assault, the largest American military operation since the Vietnam War, at least 15 American servicemen and an American civilian woman were killed and 59 other Americans were wounded. There was no exact count of Panamanian casualties, but news reports said scores were killed and hundreds wounded. Four of the helicopters were downed.

Although United States officials tried to discount General Noriega's ability to elude thousands of pursuing American soldiers, their anxiety was evident tonight when the White House announced a \$1 million reward for the capture of the Panamanian leader.

### Noriega on Radios

Later, The Associated Press reported that brief remarks by General Noriega had been broadcast by the national radio. He appealed to Panamanians to "win or die" in resisting United States forces. Where the general spoke was not disclosed. Shortly afterward the radio went off the air as its building was attacked by American forces.

After a night and a day of fighting in and around Panama City that began at 1 A.M. with a coordinated assault by paratroopers, infantry and marines across three fronts, the White House was unable to declare President Bush's first major military operation a complete success. There was scattered resistance from Panamanian troops and armed bands of civilians.

There also were reports that Americans, including some journalists, had been removed from a downtown hotel at gunpoint. The Smithsonian Institution in Washington, which conducts research in Panama, reported that 11 people, including five Americans, were removed by armed Panamanians from a research center on the San Blas islands off Panama's Caribbean coast.

### Reinforcements Sent

Latin American governments today condemned the operation. The Soviet Union called for world condemnation of the move while stressing that it was not necessarily a cause for confrontation between East and West. [Page A24.]

Pentagon officials said tonight that they were sending in a fresh brigade of soldiers from the Army's 7th Infantry Division to relieve exhausted troops and begin the dangerous task of moving into the downtown streets of the capital, where widespread looting was reported. In all, the United States has about 24,000 troops in Panama, including the 12,000 stationed there before the operation began.

The Pentagon has entitled the operation Just Cause. Offering justification for the military action, President Bush said that Americans were placed in grave danger after the Noriega regime declared itself in a state of war with the United States on Friday. He also cited the threat to United States installations in Panama and Washington's rights under the Panama Canal Treaties.

Mr. Bush acted after an unarmed American officer was shot and killed

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## The Attack

# U.S. Troops Install a New Government in Panama, but They Fail to Find Noriega

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on Saturday in downtown Panama City by Panamanian soldiers.

Secretary of State James A. Baker 3d said the United States had received an intelligence report that General Noriega was considering a plan to attack United States civilians in Panama. But he said the report could not be reliably confirmed and in any case had been received after Mr. Bush decided on Sunday to authorize the military action.

### Major Gains Are Claimed

Mr. Bush and his top aides, who spent the day closeted in their offices and command centers, proclaimed that they had achieved some important goals, including driving General Noriega from power and securing American citizens and installations at a time of increasing violence in Panama.

"General Noriega is in hiding," a somber Mr. Bush said in a nationally televised speech early this morning that drew a quick and largely positive response from lawmakers of both parties. "Yesterday a dictator ruled Panama and today, constitutionally elected leaders govern," the President said.

"I took this action only after reaching the conclusion that every other avenue was closed and the lives of Amer-

ican citizens were in grave danger," Mr. Bush said.

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In offering justification for the military operation, Administration officials have repeatedly cited a resolution passed by the Panamanian National Assembly on Friday. "It is declared that the Republic of Panama is in a state of war while there is aggression against the people of Panama from the United States of America," the resolution said.

Gen. Colin L. Powell, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the United States did not know where General Noriega was. But he vowed to continue hunting the General and said, "As a practical matter we have decapitated him from the dictatorship of this country, and he is now a fugitive and will be treated as such."

### Total of 24,000 Troops

Lieut. Gen. Thomas W. Kelly, director of operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said General Noriega, whom he called "a crafty devil as you know," had eluded American forces on Tuesday night. He said General Noriega had been "spotted several times" on Tuesday before the assault.

"We have every spigot turned on that we can turn on to capture the fugitive Mr. Noriega," General Kelly said at a Pentagon news conference.

General Kelly said the United States forces had met their first-day objective

of breaking the Panamanian Defense Forces as a fighting body. He said that there were still pockets of fighting and credible but unconfirmed reports of Americans being taken hostage, but that "organized resistance" had been quashed in most areas around Panama City.

There were reports of widespread looting. The "dignity battalions," armed civilian bands organized by General Noriega, were roaming Panama City and "have to be our next priority," General Kelly said. Despite Washington's declarations that a new Government was in power in Panama, the officials sworn in at an American military base just before the attack began and instantly recognized by Washington did not appear to be in control. And as the White House struggled to explain its reasons for sending the American military into the streets of a foreign capital, Administration officials sought to deflect attention from the fate of General Noriega and toward the other goals of the military operation.

The newly sworn-in President, Guillermo Endara, and his two vice presidents, Ricardo Arias Calderón and Guillermo Ford, who won a May election that was later nullified by General Noriega, were in hiding out of fear for their lives. A senior American diplomat in Panama said he expected "a great deal of concern and fear" as long as General Noriega remained free.

### Night of Phone Calls

Members of Congress supported Mr. Bush, who has been under intense pressure to take military action against the defiant general since a coup failed in October. "Under the circumstances, the decision is justified," said the Speaker of the House, Thomas S. Foley.

But others questioned Mr. Bush's decision to use military force. Representative Charles B. Rangel, Democrat of New York, said, "I don't see the legal authority of the use of the military."

Mr. Bush and his top aides spent the night telephoning Latin American leaders and American allies around the world and sent a cable to the Soviet leadership informing them of the Panama operation. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher of Britain, who was telephoned by Mr. Bush personally, gave a ringing endorsement of the American action.

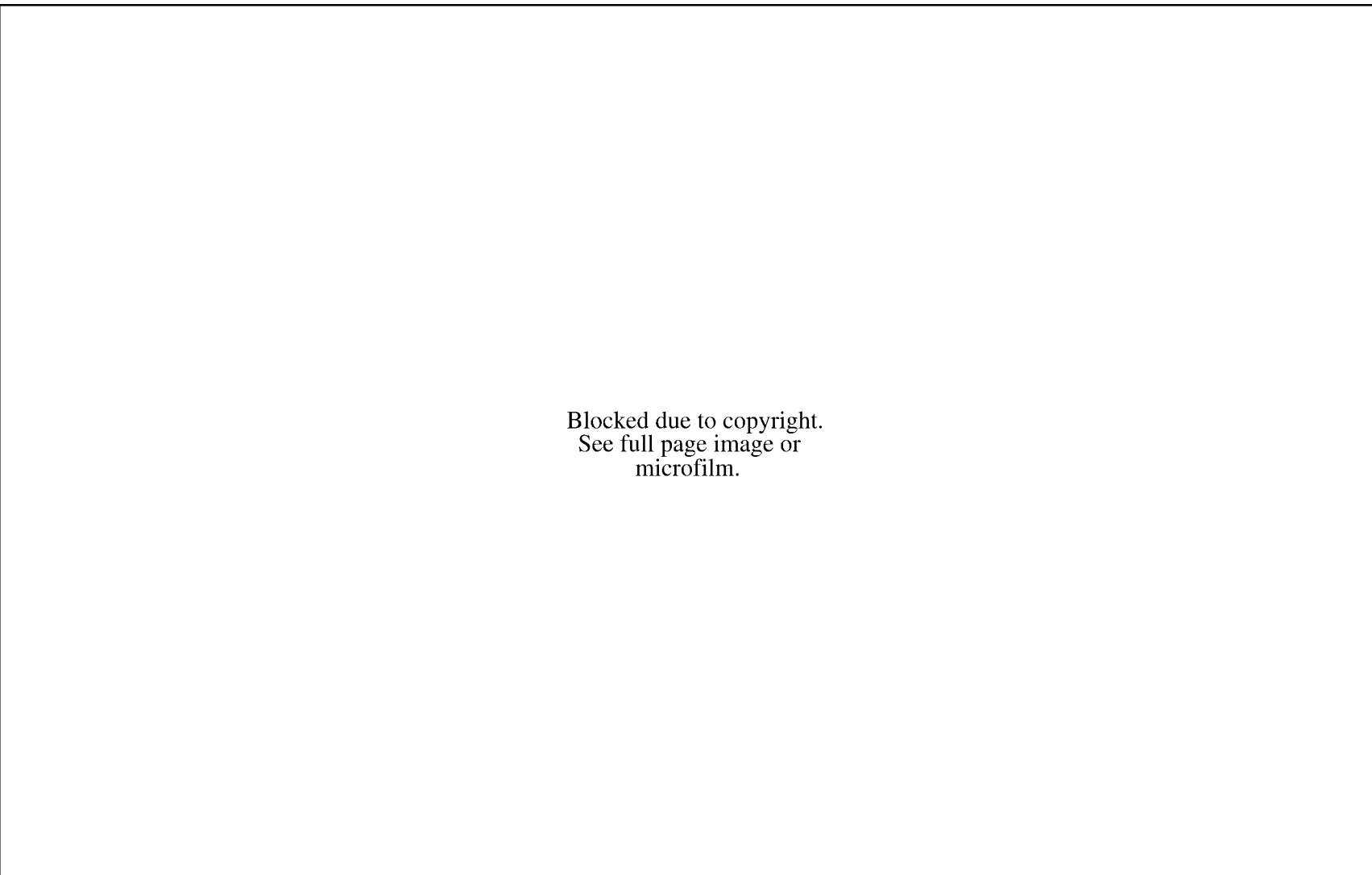
Administration officials said Mr. Bush made his initial decision to send American troops into Panama to seize General Noriega on Sunday. "The die was pretty much cast" at a Christmas brunch attended by Mr. Bush, Vice President Dan Quayle, Defense Secretary Dick Cheney and their wives.

Mr. Endara, Mr. Ford and Mr. Calderón were called in by United States officials on Monday evening and informed of the military plan, American officials said.

On Tuesday, Mr. Bush met with his top advisers to complete the plan, a meeting that was disguised by the White House as a session intended to discuss "a wider role for the military in the war against drugs."

Mr. Bush and his top aides worked through the night, with the President dividing his time between the Oval Office and an adjacent study.

After a nap, Mr. Bush appeared on national television and then spent the



American soldiers preparing to move a howitzer to a new position in Panama City after firing into a barracks of the Panamanian military.

day in his office monitoring the progress of the operation. Apparently seeking to avoid appearing to be nervously watching the events, Mr. Bush left his office in the early evening to attend a Christmas party, just as he had done on Tuesday before the attack began.

In Panama, the three new Government officials were sworn in by a Panamanian judge at a United States military base. The oath was witnessed by two officials of Panama's human rights association, because no Panamanian Government official could be enlisted to participate.

### Fears of General

United States officials, eager to demonstrate the legitimacy of the new Government, released a videotape of the swearing-in ceremony.

John Bushnell, the highest-ranking United States official in Panama, told reporters there today that he was worried that "there is still going to be a great deal of concern and fear among the Panamanians" until General Noriega is taken into custody.

As the first day of fighting passed without the capture of General Noriega, Administration officials seemed concerned about the urgency that had been placed on capturing the elusive general and bringing him to trial in the United States on drug charges.

## 'I don't see the legal authority' to use the military, Rep. Rangel says.

"It may be that there was too much emphasis put on snatching Noriega" in early Administration statements on the Panama operation, one senior official said. "We should have just stuck with protecting Americans and restoring democracy, which we are capable of doing even if Noriega is hiding in a basement for two months."

The military operation began at 1 A.M. as American forces, reinforced quietly over two days by airborne Army Rangers, infantry soldiers and marines from the United States, quickly seized a series of critical objectives, including power stations, the international airfield and the headquarters of General Noriega's Panamanian Defense Forces, General Powell said at a Pentagon news conference.

Huge columns of smoke and flame poured out of the military headquarters, which was the site of intense fighting on Oct. 3 when a group of mid-level

officers tried without success to overthrow General Noriega. That failure prompted intense criticism of Mr. Bush, who decided to take only minimal military action in support of the coup and later had to watch from the sidelines as General Noriega called in reinforcements and quashed the uprising.

Today, the Americans bottled up some Panamanian military units loyal to General Noriega and by nightfall had cleared out the headquarters and secured the other major Panamanian base within Panama City, Fort Amador. General Kelly said that by evening the United States had captured 250 Panamanian soldiers and had given shelter to 1,000 refugees at a hastily erected camp.

Television footage from the scene showed heaps of bodies in makeshift infirmaries, as well as dozens of people, most of them in civilian clothes, being carried into ambulances and treated in hospitals.

An opposition spokesman, Luis Martinz, said by telephone today that he knew the attack had started because his house began vibrating at about 1 A.M. from bombing. "My reaction was 'Thank God, at last.'" he said. "I don't know how patriotic that sounds, but the situation had gotten very nasty recently."

Mr. Martinz said the military situation appeared to have stabilized, but he said widespread looting was taking place in several downtown areas, and that civilians were being beaten and robbed by roving bands of thugs from the "dignity battalions."

Madeleine Jacobs, a spokeswoman for the Smithsonian Institution, said the 11 people abducted from the institution's research facility included 5 Americans, 5 Panamanians and 1 Venezuelan.

The Smithsonian Tropical Research Institute, with headquarters in Panama City, employs 140 people and operates five marine laboratories in Panama, including one on the San Blas island chain off the Caribbean coast, from which the researchers were taken.

Dr. Ira Rubinoff, the institute director, was talking with the remote facility by radio-telephone when told that a boat containing armed men was approaching, the spokeswoman said. Several hours after the line went dead, Dr. Rubinoff got a call from one of the technicians, who said he had been brought back to the base to get food. The technician, she said, reported that the party had been taken to Carti, a small town on the mainland, and was told that those taken would be trucked to El Llano.