

PREPARATIONS AND ADJUSTMENTS

When preparing and disseminating the PDF order of battle, U.S. analysts generally included information on Noriega's paramilitary Dignity Battalions, or, as American military personnel derisively called them, DigBats (a play on the word *dingbat*, meaning, among other things, "an empty-headed or silly person.") Formed in 1988 ostensibly under the regime's minister of public works, the Dignity Battalions dressed in civilian clothes—often in T-shirts with *Batallón Dignidad* stenciled on them—and included PDF members, government workers, regime supporters, the unemployed, and criminals and thugs. Some members joined of their free will, some participated under pressure, some were paid, and some owed their jobs to the dictatorship. Whatever the motives, when called on, this mishmash of people could swell the ranks of a regime-sponsored political rally or demonstration; members could also be used to intimidate or physically abuse Noriega's opponents. In May 1989, the DigBats attracted international attention when they carried out their most publicized act of violence, the postelection attack on the "victory" march staged by the opposition candidates and their supporters. Most of the time, the Dignity Battalions carried sticks, hoses, and pipes with which to beat their victims. Given their close ties to the government, however, several analysts assumed that, in the event of war with the United States, they would likely have access to more lethal weapons. Thus, when the JUST CAUSE execute order of 18 December stated that "all parts" of the Panama Defense Forces could be attacked by U.S. forces, the Dignity Battalions were included among the eligible elements. As their name implied, DigBats presumed that they enjoyed a quasi-military status. Yet their organization and training was never so structured as to provide U.S. intelligence personnel any clear idea of the number of Panamanians involved.²⁴

To defeat the Panama Defense Forces and any other armed groups, to capture Noriega, and to begin the transformation of Panama into a true democracy, the U.S. invasion plan called for the employment of just over twenty-seven thousand troops. Nearly half of this force was already in Panama, either because the units were based there, as in the case of the Southern Command's component forces, or because they had rotated into the country as a part of troop augmentations conducted over the course of the crisis, namely, the security enhancement buildup of early 1988 and Operation NIMROD DANCER in May 1989. The remainder of the invasion force would deploy from bases in the United States. The U.S. order of battle identified Operation JUST CAUSE as a joint undertaking, although the Army represented the largest portion of the force, nearly 80 percent. Of the conventional troops involved, 18,587 were soldiers and 2,850 more came from Army units in the Special Operations Forces (*Table 1*). Not that service allegiance mattered that much to Stiner. For him, the important fact was that the Pentagon had given him all the troops he had requested through the Southern Command. There had been no haggling over numbers.²⁵

²⁴ Kempe, *Divorcing the Dictator*, pp. 357–58; Msg, CJCS to CINCSO et al., 182325Z Dec 1989, sub: EXORD [Execute Order]\USCINCSO OPOD 1–90 (BLUE SPOON). As for the word *dingbat*, it came readily to mind for U.S. officers because it had been popularized in a 1970s television comedy, *All in the Family*.

²⁵ The troop numbers are taken from Briefing Slides, SOUTHCOM, Operation JUST CAUSE: "Rebirth of a Nation," n.d. Stiner's account of receiving all the troops he requested (and even