

FROM GLORY TO DISGRACE

The Haitian Army

1804 - 1994

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By

Prosper Avril

From Glory to Disgrace: The Haitian Army, 1804 - 1994

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“It is not advisable to say every truth” says the adage, but when it is a question of the survival of a nation, we must even scream it in order to fight against the pernicious effects of the lies or the half-truths that are enveloping everyone. “So that the poison can be eliminated, it is necessary to keep public opinion resolutely informed. A well-informed society is, we must repeat as long as we have the right to talk, the very test of democracy.”

Alfred Sauvy

“It is not inside the Army that can be found the cure to the vices of the Army. It is inside the country itself.”

Charles Alexis de Tocqueville
(Democracy in America)

From Glory to Disgrace, The Haitian Army, (1804–1994), the English version of the book *L'Armée d'Haïti, Bourreau ou Victime?* published in French in 1997, is a tribute to those foreign friends of Haiti who worked so very hard in search of a solution to the difficult situation endured by Haiti during the period from 1991 to 1994. It is especially dedicated to the prestigious members of the delegation sent to this country in September 1994 by President Bill Clinton, composed of former President Jimmy Carter, Senator Samuel Nunn and General Colin Powell. Thanks to their humanism, the Haitian people were spared a dreadful massacre.

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CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	xi
FOREWORD	xxiii
INTRODUCTION	xxvii
CHAPTER ONE	31
GENESIS OF THE HAITIAN ARMY	31
A. Historic - The Colonial Army	31
B. The Indigenous Army	40
C. The Haitian Public Force in 1915	49
D. The Haitian Gendarmerie	54
E. The Haitian Army after ‘Haitianization’	64
CHAPTER TWO	87
POLITICIZATION OF THE HAITIAN ARMY	87
A. The first military Junta	89
B. The Army, arbitrator of political conflict	95
C. An active service Army in power	99
D. The Haitian Army, political pendulum	102
E. The military hegemony in Haiti	107

CHAPTER THREE	117
ATTEMPTS TO DEPOLITICIZE THE ARMY	117
A. The project for reorganizing the Army	118
B. The project of creating a Police Force	120
C. The project of reorganizing the Rural Section	122
D. Abandoning the projects	124
 CHAPTER FOUR	 127
THE HAITIAN ARMY UNDER SUBJUGATION	127
A. The reasons for an about-face	128
B. The purge	130
C. Creation of the Militia	134
D. Closing of the Military Academy	137
 CHAPTER FIVE	 141
THE ORDEALS OF THE HAITIAN ARMY	141
A. The bloody faction fighting	142
B. The attempted kidnaping of Duvalier's son	146
C. The execution of 19 Army Officers	150
D. The mutiny of Haitian Coast Guard.	175
 CHAPTER SIX	 183
ATTEMPTS AT A RECOVERY	183
A. Modernization initiatives	184
B. The fall of the Duvalier regime	189
C. The 1987 Constitution and the Haitian Army ...	196

CHAPTER SEVEN	203
THE CATALYSTS OF DISGRACE	203
A. The illegal drug's trade	204
B. The disruptive infiltration of the Army	210
C. The tradition of oppression	212
D.- The generalized lack of discipline	218
 CHAPTER EIGHT	 223
The Haitian Army in free fall	223
A.- The June 1988 <i>coup</i>	224
B. The September 1988 <i>coup</i>	232
C. The attempted <i>coup of April</i> 1989	240
D. The <i>coup of September</i> 1991	262
 CHAPTER NINE	 287
TWILIGHT OF THE HAITIAN ARMY	287
A. Confusion in the country's leadership	288
B.-The last chance, Governors Island	291
C. The landing of US troops	297
D. Dismantling the Haitian Army	308
 CHAPTER TEN	 321
PROSPECTS FOR A NEW HAITIAN ARMY	321
A.- The Haitian Army, the mute victim	321
B. A suggested solution	331
C.- Why an Army in Haiti?	340
D. The dream	350

CONCLUSION	355
APPENDIX I	363
Organization of the Infantry Act in 1807	363
APPENDIX II	367
List of the US Officers of the Haitian Gendarmerie ..	367
APPENDIX III	371
Protocol for the formation of the Gendarmerie	371
APPENDIX IV	377
Laws and Acts concerning the Haitian Army	377
APPENDIX V	389
In Memoriam - List of the Haitian Officers killed ...	389
BIBLIOGRAPHY	393
INDEX	403

ILLUSTRATIONS

Following page xx

Position of Haiti in the Caribbean

Following page 70

- 1.- The Indian Statute in Port-au-Prince
Honoring Caonabo, Chief of Xaragua (1492)
- 2.- The Unknown Maroon Statute in Port-au-Prince
Honoring the first fugitive Black who refused slavery (1791)
- 3.- Black Maroons in an ambush against the Spaniards (1791)
- 4.- General Toussaint Louverture (1802)
Commander-in-Chief of the Colonial Army
- 5.- General Charles Leclerc (1802)
Commander-in-Chief of the French Expeditionary Forces
- 6.- The “Ravine-à-Couleuvres” battle (1802)
Fight of the Colonial Army against the French Expeditionary forces
- 7.- Battle in Saint-Domingue (1803)
Fight of the Indigenous Army against the Napoleon troops
- 8.- General François Capois (1803)
Hero of Vertières Battle for Haiti’s Independence

- 9.- The Oath of the Founding Fathers (January 1st, 1804)
- 10.-General Jean-Jacques Dessalines (1804)
General-Governor of Haiti and General-in-Chief of the
Indigenous Army
- 11.-General Henri Christophe (1807)
King of Haiti and Generalissimo of the Army of the North
- 12.-General Alexandre Pétion (1807)
President of Haiti and General-in-chief of the Army of the West
- 13.-General André Rigaud (1810)
President of the South State
General-in-Chief of the Army of the South
- 14.- General Jean-Pierre Boyer (1822)
President of Haiti and Commander-in-Chief of all the Armies of
the Island of Haiti
- 15.-General Lysius Félicité Salomon Jeune (1878)
The last genuine reformer of the Indigenous Army
- 16.-Officers of the Indigenous Army in 1903

Following page 268

- 1.- Rear-Admiral William B. Caperton (1915)
Commanding Officer of the US invasion Forces in Haiti
- 2.- General of Division Smedley Butler (1915)
First Commander-in-Chief of the Gendarmerie of Haiti:

-
- 3.- Colonel Démosthène P. Calixte (1934)
Commander-in-Chief of the Guard of Haiti
 - 4.- The Military Executive Council (January 1946 – August 1946)
and the Military Junta of Government (May 1950
December 1950)
 - 5.- General of Division Paul Magloire
President of Haiti (December 1950 – December 1956)
 - 6.- The Military Council of Government (June 1957 – October
1957)
 - 7.- The Cadets of the Military Academy on parade (1961)
 - 8.- The 1959 class of Haitian Cadets on training at Quantico, Virginia
 - 9.- The first combat jet aircraft of the Haitian Army
 - 10.- The National Council of Government (CNG) No 1 (1986)
 - 11.- The National Council of Government (CNG) No 2 (1986)
 - 12.- The CNG No 3 (1987)
 - 13.- General-President Henri Namphy (1988)
 - 14.- General-President Prosper Avril (1988)
 - 15.- Participation of a dedicated Haitian Woman Officer in a
vaccination campaign of the Ministry of Health (1989)

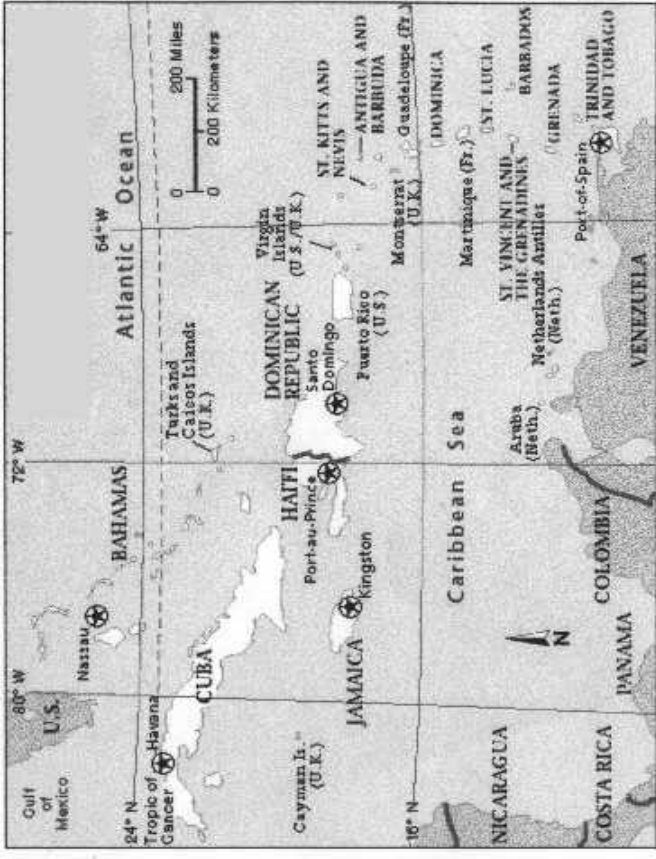
- 16.-The 565 Chiefs-of-Section summoned for instruction on respect of human rights (August 1989)
- 17.-The Commander-in-Chief and President Prosper Avril is awarded the highest decoration of the Republic of China (January 1990)
- 18.-Female Officers of the Medical Corps of the Haitian Army (1989)

Following page 316

- 1.- General Hugh Shelton
Commanding officer of the US invasion Forces in Haiti (1994)
- 2.- The occupation of the National Palace by the US troops (1994)
- 3.- Lieutenant-General Raoul Cedras
The last Commander-in-Chief of the Haitian Army (1991)
- 4.- The Haitian Army in total disgrace

Back cover page

Photo of the Author



Position of Haiti in the Caribbean

FOREWORD

The date of September 19, 1994, the day of a second humiliation for the country, will stand as one of shame in the history of the sovereign Haitian people. For the second time, Haiti pitifully fell under military occupation. For authentic Haitians, particularly the wholesome and conscientious youth and those who did not experience the 1915 insult, this date must represent without any doubt the most humiliating day of national history. It was even more ignominious and shameful than the day of July 29, 1915, because, this time, the occupation of the country occurred by the will of a Haitian citizen who, in order to attain his own goals, abused the legitimate authority given to him by a mandate of the Haitian people.

Because President Jean-Bertrand Aristide had been removed by force from office, and in reaction to the intransigent attitude of General Raoul Cédras, who had recently been appointed by him to head the Haitian Army, President Aristide asked for help from abroad to recover the power taken from him. On his return to the National Palace, he finally ordered, beyond the power conferred on him by the Constitution and in flagrant violation of its prescriptions, the dismantling of the country's oldest institution, the one that had brought the nation to its baptismal font: the Army. Encouraged by the tacit or implied consent of his supporters to this surprising initiative, the naïve, irresponsible reaction of the mob, and by the strange and indifferent complicity of the Multinational Force of Occupation, President Aristide, before leaving office, proposed an amendment to the Constitution that

would confirm the abolition of any form of military force in Haiti.

However, for many years, when the nation was facing dangers of civil unrest, the people, with the total approval of the politicians, were out on the streets of our major cities calling the armed forces to the rescue. More recently, during the events of February 7, 1986, when the Duvalier regime fell, it was with cries of “Long live the Army!” shouted from every corner of the country that the Haitian people greeted the accession of the civil-military junta, the National Council of Government (CNG), to manage ‘post-Duvalier’ Haiti. Nowadays, one tends to throw a veil of contempt, even a shroud, over the Haitian Army, which is accused of being responsible for the disaster into which the Republic of Haiti has been plunged.

Since its Independence in the year 1804, Haiti always had an army, the heir to the ‘Indigenous Army’ victorious in a war that, after the magnificent battle of Vertières of November 18, 1803, culminated in the birth of the nation. The Indigenous Army was dissolved in 1915 upon the arrival of US military forces that disarmed the population and, at the same time, disbanded all other security forces in the country: military units, judicial police, national guard, municipal police, etc. A new and unique entity that was given a multiple mission, ‘the Gendarmerie of Haiti’, filled the large vacuum thus created. As time went on, this entity became the ‘Guard of Haiti’, afterwards the ‘Army of Haiti’, and finally the ‘Armed Forces of Haiti’.

Today, the dismantling of the Armed Forces of Haiti, although decreed arbitrarily, is a fact. A newly created police force is assigned the task of “guaranteeing public order and the

protection of life and property of the citizens” (Article 269-1 of the Constitution). The task of “guaranteeing the security and the integrity of the territory of the Republic of Haiti” (Article 264) is completely ignored. It seems therefore obvious that the nonexistence of the Army leaves the Haitian people exposed, without being able to assure the protection of the sacred legacy of the fatherland, a task that traditionally is rightfully the responsibility of the military, - an obligation imposed by the Haitian Constitution.

In the face of this situation, I wanted to undertake a study of the facts that have brought the country to this disturbing situation and to analyze the impact of the absence of the Army on the future of Haiti. In this book I have striven to remain as objective as possible. Far from me is any intention to support the thesis that the Haitian military has always accomplished its mission with effectiveness, honesty and without faults. Many historians, journalists and analysts have already mentioned the sometimes-hazardous role played by the Haitian Army throughout our national history. For my part, I wish to explore in depth the real causes that resulted in this catastrophe and make clear my own viewpoint. Furthermore, in this study, I do not claim to have written the last word on the subject. I publish here only an essay that does not pretend to exhaust this perplexing though stimulating question.

As a career soldier, who has unremittently observed a good part of the process that resulted in this national disaster, I think I have a patriotic duty to analyze the causes and, humbly propose solutions to the misfortune that afflicts Haiti. Since October 1959, when my career in the military began, I was a privileged witness to the web of events that led to the dismantling of the Haitian Army, against the background of a military intervention against Haiti. Moreover, my time in the