Haitian Vigilantes Place U.S. Troops in a Difficult Position

By Tracy Wilkinson

LOS ANGELES TIMES

GRANITE ISLANDS, HAITI (Dec. 31, 1993)

A man described as the military junta's most notorious hired gun in northern Haiti, was turned over Thursday to U.S. Special Forces by a cheering crowd, in what is likely the last act of vigilante justice that poses a growing challenge for American troops.

Leaving on two canes and suffering from a gaping wound on his head, Jean Claude Celestine was led by hundreds of villagers to the two-story church rectory that now serves as headquarters for U.S. forces, who occupied this colonial-era town last month.

American officials said Celestine was wanted in numerous killings in Cap-Haitien, Haiti's second largest city and about 13 miles northeast of here.

Celestine had apparently fled to Grande Riviere du Nord just ahead of U.S. occupation forces and was discovered by residents who recognized and captured him. They said he was already wounded when they found him, and there were reports he had been beaten while briefly detained by police in Cap-Haitien.

This was just one of scores of incidents in which emboldened, jubilant crowds in towns all over rural northern Haiti have snatched their enemies, often from their homes or on public streets, and paraded them to the nearest U.S. military barracks.

Popular justice to some, mob rule to others, such actions seem to serve as catharsis for many Haitians who have had to repress their anger during years of brutal dictatorship. But they put U.S. forces in a tricky position as they struggle to define what is clearly an expanding police role.

Each time a new captive is delivered, the U.S. forces find themselves having to make snap judgments about potential guilt, about who's lying and who's telling the truth. In numerous cases, the American GIs have had to rescue and protect accused attackers or other dissenters before enraging crowds.

In the northern border town of Ouanaminthe, two Special Forces officers on Monday pleaded a para-military agent from the center of about 400 people who had surrounded him.

Three Witnesses Implicate Jailed Politician in PRI Assassination

By Joannita Darling

LOS ANGELES TIMES

An imprisoned politician with family ties to drug dealers was formally accused Thursday of helping to plan the assassination of his party's No. 2 official, and the attorney general's office said the plot is the sort of conspiracy that is becoming a growing challenge for American troops.

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Assistant Attorney General Maria Ruiz Massieu, the slain politician's brother, said the plot is the sort of conspiracy that is becoming a growing challenge for American troops.

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