

Defense, Internal Security and the Other Roles of Belize's Military

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Introduction

Scholars such as Ivelaw Griffith, Anthony Payne, Alma Young¹ and others have examined the Belize Defense Force (BeDF), but always as part of a larger work. This paper focuses only on the Belize military, and perhaps is the first exclusive treatment of this organization. The author examines the military of Belize in some detail. Descriptive rather than analytical, it covers the basic aspects of the BeDF: Origin, structure, training, defense and other roles of Belize's military, including internal security. Belize is bordered to the north and north west by Mexico; south and west by Guatemala and on the east by the Bay of Honduras (on the Caribbean Sea). The borders to the north, the Rio Hondo and the East, the Caribbean Sea, are well defined. This study shows that, in view of the fact that the border to the south and south west with Guatemala is not as well defined, coupled with the Guatemalan territorial claim, Belize's military conducts air reconnaissance on a regular scheduled basis in collaboration with infantry foot patrols. These missions, in support of the BeDF's three major roles of external defense, illegal immigration and illicit drugs, gather information on the creation of new tracks of land and illegal airstrips, illegal farming, squatters and marijuana cultivation.

Origin

Unlike the defense forces of Antigua and Barbuda, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago, all of which were started to coincide with independence, the BeDF came into being on 1 January, 1978, three years before Belize (then British Honduras)² became independent, with the passage of the Defense Act by the House of Representatives.³

The BeDF became operational on 3 January 1978, when 60 men, drawn mainly from the disbanded Police Special Force and the Belize Volunteer Guard, paraded at Price Barracks, Ladyville. According to Longdon, it started with a headquarters company and two rifle companies.¹

It was established to assist the resident British forces in Belize with the defense of Belize against Guatemala. The Belize Government had from the 1976 budget given an earnest commitment of its intention by providing capital funds for that enterprise.

In his statement to the House of Representatives, according to The New Belize, the then Deputy Premier and Minister of Home Affairs, Carl L.B. Rodgers said:

I am not saying that in the next three to four years our force will be able to replace the British forces, which are here to defend Belize in line with the UK Government's commitment and responsibility to do so. But this force will be able to play its envisaged role in defense once its up to its projected strength and will grow in size

¹ A third rifle company was added in 1987.

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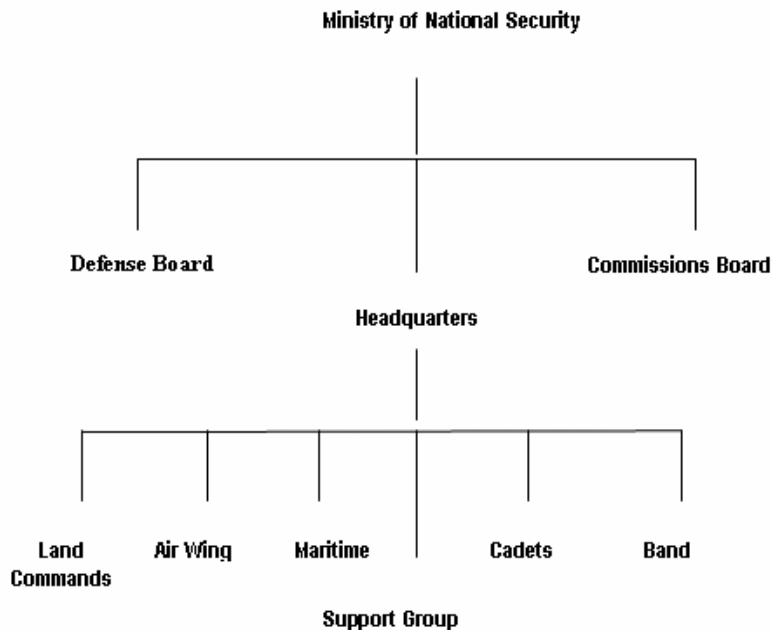
and effectiveness as finance and other circumstances relating to its growth demands.

At its inception, the small group of men was considered insufficient, and so the British Loan Service officers, who were responsible for initial recruitment, instituted a recruitment program. In addition to radio broadcasts and newspaper advertisements, recruiting teams, in Land Rovers, perused the towns and villages of Belize as well as Belize City and the capital, Belmopan.² The first intake in 1978 was 30 males, with subsequent intakes bringing the total to 187.

Historically, the first organized volunteer force was established in 1817 as the Prince Regent Royal Honduras Militia. This evolved into the Belize Volunteer Guard, which was disbanded in 1977. The BeDF set up a volunteer arm on 19 April 1977.³ It also included a Maritime Wing, established in March 1982, and an Air Wing, set up in 1983, the British government donating two Britten Norman Defender aircraft, the Toucan and the Tapir to its operation.

Structure

Figure 1
Structure of the Belize Defense Force



² Recruitment took place at schools, colleges, community centers and even homes in the following areas: Corozal, Orange Walk, San Ignacio and Santa Elena, Dangriga; in Blue Creek, Pueblo Vie, Guinea Grass, Douglas, Cattle Landing, Jacintoville, San Antonio, San Pedro, San Estevan, Pomona and Progresso

³ Between 1817 and 1978, the military force in Belize has had ten different names: The Prince Regent's Royal Militia (1817- 1866); The Belize Volunteer Force (1866-1868); The Belize Volunteer Corps (1868-1883); The Belize Light Infantry Volunteer Force (1897-1905); British Honduras Volunteers (1905-1916); British Honduras Territorial Force (1916-1928); British Honduras Defense Force (1928-1944); British Honduras Home Guard (1942-1943); British Honduras Volunteer Guard (1943-1947); Belize Volunteer Guard (1947-1977); D.N.A. Fairweather, A Short History of the Volunteer Forces of British Honduras (now Belize), publisher & year of publication, unknown: 43

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At the apex of the BeDF is the 5-member **Defense Board**, which falls under the **Ministry of Defense** (formerly Ministry of National Security). The Board is composed of the Deputy Prime Minister, who serves as chairman; the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Defense; the Commandant and Deputy Commandant (BeDF;) and the Head of the Defense Secretariat, Ministry of National Security. The Head of the Defense Secretariat acts as the Recording Secretary. Previously, both the British Military Advisor and the Chief of Staff served as members of this body, but unlike other Commonwealth Caribbean countries, Belize's Attorney General is not a member of the Defense Board.

Through the minister responsible for defense, the **Commissions Board** advises the Governor General on appointments to commissions and promotions up to the rank of major/lieutenant commander. The minister responsible for defense, after consultation with the Prime Minister, recommends appointments beyond the rank of major. The eight-member Commissions Board has five permanent members: The Commandant, BeDF; the chair of the Public Services Commission, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of National Security; the Commanding Officer of the 1st Infantry Battalion; and the Force Adjutant, SO2 F1. The remaining three — the Commanding Officer of the 2nd Infantry Battalion; the Commanding Officer of the Maritime Wing; and the Commanding Officer of the Air Wing, serve as necessary to represent the land, sea or air elements. The Chairman of the Commissions Board is the Commandant, BeDF and the Adjutant is its secretary.

The BeDF is organized into the following principal units: Headquarters Company, Support Group, two regular land commands (formerly battalions), one reserve land command, an air wing, a maritime wing, a cadet corps, and a band. **Headquarters**, located at Price Barracks, Airport Camp, nine miles northwest of Belize City, is responsible for the command, operation and training of BeDF personnel. Unlike the defense forces of Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and Barbados, the BeDF has never had a Defense Advisor stationed overseas.

The **Support Company** commands the specialist platoons of the force. They are the Mortar Platoon, Signal Platoon, Reece Platoon, and the Combat Engineer Platoon. The **Combat Engineer Platoon**, formerly referred to as the **Assault Pioneers** in the early days of the BeDF, has heavy equipment at its disposal and is trained to renovate and erect buildings as well as engage in construction (Stamp, 1999). Part of the engineer unit is an Explosive Ordnance Dispose Team. Its role is to defuse or destroy bombs and engage in demolition work.

The **1st Land Command**, headed by a Lt. Colonel, has a headquarters company and three rifle companies.⁴ The **2nd Land Command** of the BeDF, a second regular infantry unit formed in 1994, is too made up of three rifle companies and is headed by a Lt. Colonel. These two land commands rotate between the camps on a nine-month cycle and are involved in training, guard duties and defense. The last entails frequent jungle patrols along Belize's southern and western borders with Guatemala.

The **3rd or Volunteer Land Command** is organized as an integral part of the BeDF under the organizational command of the **BeDF's** Commandant.⁵ It is headed by a commanding officer with the rank of Lt. Colonel and consists of a headquarters at Price Barracks, three rifle companies, and two detachment platoons.⁶

⁴ The three rifle companies are Echo, Foxtrot and Sierra.

⁵ The headquarters of the Volunteer Force is made up of eighteen (18) personnel who are members of the regular force, led by a captain.

⁶ The locations of the volunteer rifle companies are as follows: Company B at Belize City (in the central area), Company C at Dangriga (in the north), and Company D at Corosal (in the south). The detachment

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The BeDF has three outer command posts. There is Camp Belizario in the Center (west of Belmopan and formerly Holdfast Camp); Camp Eyles (formerly Orange Walk Drill Hall) in Orange Walk, and Camp Fairweather (formerly Rideau Camp) in Punta Gorda near the coast of southern Belize.⁷

The **BeDF Band** was formed on 1 January 1978 from the former Belize Volunteer Guard Band, under the mastership of the late Warrant Officer Class 1, Walter P. Lamb. The band was originally formed in 1947 from the North Caribbean Force (Battalion of Belize) fundamentally as a Drum & Bugle Corps, at Mount Pleasant Creek, Central Farm in the Cayo District. In 1952, it added the brass section to the Drums & Bugle Corps that was the nucleus of what would evolve into the existing BeDF Band.

The **BeDF Cadet Corps**, formerly the Belize Cadet Corps, was absorbed into the BeDF in July 1981. It is headed by a Commander and is under the wings of the volunteer element.⁸

The small **Maritime Wing** of the BeDF, which patrols 40,000 square miles of sea, is headed by a commander. In 1999, it was composed of two 20-metre (65 ft) Wasp vessels, the Dangriga and the Toledo. These two Brooke Marine patrol craft were gifts from the United Kingdom (Caribbean Insight, 1989). In addition, the maritime wing has a number of small assault craft, which are regularly used to support the fisheries department and assist in anti-narcotics operations. The British also assisted in the construction of a slipway and dredged a channel to allow the vessels of the BeDF maritime wing to enter Haulover Creek at the mouth of the Belize River on the east coast. Apart from its base in Belize City, there are three other operational bases: Punta Gorda (in Toledo), Placentia and Hunting Caye.

The **BeDF Air Wing** is based at the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport, with a complement of 5 aircraft.⁹ A 767260 Slingsby Firefly is still used for screening potential pilots and for basic flight training prior to sending students for formal military pilot training in Canada. According to Dortch, it also serves as the Air Wing's training aircraft for qualified pilots. Because the Belizean border is not well defined, pilots on reconnaissance missions rely on the Global Positioning System, coupled with their own experience. Although the BeDF's aircraft are all fixed wing, the "Gazelle" helicopters of the 25 Flight Army Air Corps, part of the British Army Training Support Unit Team, provide key logistical support for the BeDF.

In 1996, the **Combat Engineers Platoon** was placed under the command of the Air Wing for administrative reasons. Apart from the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport, there are some thirty landing strips in Belize, some of which are privately owned and not registered.¹⁰

platoons are found at Orange Walk (near Belmopan), Punta Gorda Town (in the south), San Ignacio Town (near the mid-Guatemalan coast), Cayo and Stann Creek, the latter in the south.

⁷ Also, there are three observation posts: Cadenas in the southwestern corner of Belize, overlooking Guatemala, Cayo, near the mid-western coast of Guatemala (close to Arsenal), and Jalacte on the southwestern coast of Guatemala (near San Antonio). Cadenas is on top of a pinnacle of rock above the Sarstoon River, and its largest hut is the sole living accommodation on the post.

⁸ The Cadet Corps was formed in 1977 by Cadet Colonel (Ret) Alex Allen. Its headquarters is at Price Barracks, with detachments at the following locations: Belize City, San Ignacio, Orange Walk Town, Corozal Town, Dangriga, and Punta Gorda.

⁹ The fleet of the BeDF air wing is made up of two propeller-driven Britten-Norman Defender aircraft that were acquired at the Air Wing's inception; a Cessna - a gift to the Prime Minister of Belize by the Governor of Quintana Roo, Mexico in August 1995; a Slingsby T3A Firefly, which was gifted by the British government in March 1995; and a T67 260 Slingsby "Firefly," used as the basic pilot screener and trainer.

¹⁰ Major airstrips are found at the following locations: Gallon Jug, Punta Gorda, Belize City Municipal area, San Pedro, Mather Spring (in San Ignacio) and Savannah.

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Training

Training in the **BeDF** can be divided into five broad categories: initial training, field training, exercises, exchanges, and overseas courses.

The training syllabus is similar to that of the British Army's, with only minor deviations, owing to the differences in terrain and situation with which the Belizean soldiers are faced. Recruit training, conducted by the training wing, lasts for 16 weeks. The main course of training consists of drill, weaponry, map reading, tactics, field craft, military law, and signals. In terms of the Maritime Wing, all ranks, including officers, are required to undergo initial training as soldiers at Airport Camp, Ladyville, after which training is carried out by the BeDF Maritime Wing both ashore and afloat. Training ends with a graduation or pass-out parade for privates.

Field training, both for the regulars and reservists, is a high priority of the BeDF. In addition to the weekend exercises and bi-weekly sessions, the BeDF, and in particular the Regular Battalions, are trained in general war, jungle and internal security operations at camps throughout the country, including the Force's Jungle Warfare Camp at Maskall. The BeDF offers three jungle courses, namely, the Jungle Survival Basic Course, the Junior Warfare Basic Course, and the Jungle Warfare Instructors course.¹¹

The Force conducts two annual international camps in August at Mount Pine Ridge in the Salamanca camp area.¹² These camps have included students from the Singapore Police Force, the Mexican Armed Forces, and the BeDF.

In reference to the BeDF Volunteer force, since 1978, two regular NCOs, called permanent staff instructors, assist in the training and running of volunteer companies. This training is very much the same as that for regular soldiers.

There are exercises and exchanges with armed forces of the United Kingdom, the United States of America and others. The BeDF has hosted soldiers from the 5th Battalion, 87th Infantry Light, who participated in Jungle Warfare training. In January 1994 and 1999, a short training team from the School of Infantry, Warminster, England, conducted a three-week training course at the Airport Camp, Camp Belizario and Baldy Beacon ranges for the BeDF's mortar platoon (Selgado, 1999). Also, in 1996, the BeDF embarked on a military exchange with the U.S. Army South (Usher, 1996). A platoon, under the command of 2Lt. Mervin Reyes, went to Panama on 6 February for 3 weeks of Jungle Warfare Training.

The BeDF also participates in Exercise Trade Winds - an annual U.S. exercise with forces from the Regional Security System and from the United Kingdom. This pattern was begun in 1991 and continues to the present time, with Belize hosting the exercise in 1998 (Requena, 1999). This exercise included both an evacuation plan as well as a series of practices in close country setting at the BeDF's Jungle Warfare School at Maskall and its environs at Salamanca, Toledo.¹³

¹¹ The 38-day Jungle Warfare Instructor's course is designed for officers and soldiers of the rank of sergeant and above who are interested in becoming jungle warfare instructors at sub-unit level. The second is a 14-day Junior Warfare Basic Course designed for soldiers of the rank of corporal and below. Its graduates are able to work as a subunit in a jungle environment. The third is a 3-day Jungle Survival Basic Course for military, aircrew and civilian personnel. Its graduates are taught the basics of living and surviving in a jungle environment.

¹² Guacamallo, in the Mountain Pine Ridge, is ideal for dry training, Hill Bank for Watermanship and Salamanca in the South for jungle training.

¹³ Part of Exercise Tradewinds '98 was an evacuation plan from Dangriga, Belize City, Burrel Boom, Ladyville, Sandhill and Hattieville to Belmopan, Santa Elena, San Ignacio and as far as Peten in Guatemala and Chetumal in Mexico. The BeDF's evacuation plan is the key component in the National Plan to mitigate associated effects of coastal natural disasters.

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Extra-Caribbean Training Assistance

Training is also offered to individuals, depending upon their aptitude and educational qualifications, at overseas military institutions. BeDF personnel have attended schools in the United Kingdom, the United States of America (including Panama), Canada and Mexico.

All in all, between 1978 and 2001, 68 Belizeans have attended Sandhurst¹⁴, three of who, Earl Arthurs (1980), Lloyd Gillett (1984) and Ravei Nunez (1999), have won the overseas cane.¹⁵ The **British Forces Belize**, prior to its departure in 1995, also provided training¹⁶

Six individuals attended the Staff College between 1981 and 1997.¹⁷ The first to do so was Major Tom Greenwood (1981), who rose to the position of Deputy Commandant. Two other majors who attended, both of which become Commandants, BeDF, are Major Alan Usher and Major Earl Arthurs.¹⁸ Captains Tom Greenwood and Bernard Adolphus were among the first to complete the Platoon Commanders courses at the School of Infantry, Warminster.¹⁹

BeDF officers have received training at the U.S. Army Infantry School (formerly the School of the Americans, which was transferred from Panama in 1985), Fort Benning, Georgia as well as the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, New York. In reference to the last, the first to do so was Alexander Scott Croft Graham who graduated in the class of 1993.²⁰ BeDF Combat Engineers receive their training in the U.S., UK and Jamaica.

Canada has provided junior staff training for junior officers at the Canadian Command and Staff College in Kingston, Ontario. The junior staff course trains commissioned officers in the duties required to fill operational staff positions at military headquarters.

Relative to the Maritime Wing, training at foreign naval and coast guard establishments was started in 1989, and persons have completed the Mid-shipman's course at the Britannia Royal Naval College, Dartmouth.²¹ Personnel from the Maritime Wing have also attended the Coast Guard Reserve Training Center in York, Virginia. As for Canada, between 1983 and 1991, twenty-four Belizeans have attended the Coast Guard College in Nova Scotia.²² Since 1983,

¹⁴Correspondence, T.A. Heathcote, Curator, RMA Collection, The Royal Military Academy (RMA), Sandhurst, Camberley, Surrey, 12 July 1994; A. Parsons, RMA, Correspondence, 3 July 1998, and Sue Polley, Officer Candidate Administrative Centre, RMA, 29 August 2001.

¹⁵ The first officer cadet to attend Sandhurst from the BeDF was 2Lt. John Loskot in 1978, following by 2Lts. Alan Usher, Earl Arthurs and Hubert Cain in 1979, though the latter withdrew.

¹⁶ In terms of the latter, the following persons have received such training: S/Sgt. Leonides Yama, 2Lt. Francis Marin and 2Lt. Henry Baizar, BeDF personnel, have also completed the Junior Command and Staff Course in Belize, one such person was Captain Juan Teck.

¹⁷ The Joint Services Command and Staff College came about as a result of the closure of four former Staff colleges in the United Kingdom - the Joint Services Defense College and the Royal Naval College at Greenwich, the Army Command and Staff College at Camberley and the Royal Air Force Staff College at Bracknell.

¹⁸ Correspondence, Major (Ret.) A.C. Boyce, Staff College, Camberley, Surrey, 21 January 1994.

¹⁹ On retirement, Captain Bernard Adolphus became Superintendent of Prisons, Belize.

²⁰ Correspondence, Judith A. Sibley, West Point, New York, 30 June 1994.

²¹ Prior to 1995, the course title was the International Midshipman's Course. This one-year course was slightly different to the course taken by Royal Navy students. However, since January 1995, the course taken by foreign students is titled "The Royal Navy Officers Course" and involves the same training as those from the Royal Navy. It now lasts for 16 months; Personal correspondence, C.P. Young, Directorate of Foreign and Commonwealth Training, Ministry of Defense, 9 August 1988.

²² Correspondence, David G. Parkes, Director, Coast Guard College, Sidney, 2 November 1993.

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pilots, technicians and ground crew of the BeDF Air wing have received training at the Primary Central Flying School and the Protonge in Canada (Shephard, 1997).²³

Between 1991 and 1997, the Secretariat of National Defense of Mexico awarded twenty-nine scholarships in Mexican Military Schools to the BeDF. In 1998, two Belizeans attended the Escuela Militar de Materiales de Guerra and another the Escuela Militar de Trasmisiones. The air wing sent 2Lt. Lopez to flying school there, and Dr. Gough received training at the Escuela Militar de Graduados to become the BeDF's force surgeon in Mexico City.²⁴ Relative to Central America, a Belize delegation that included officers from CARICOM participated in a Humanitarian Allied Forces Disaster Management Exercise as well as a peacekeeping humanitarian exercise in El Salvador in 1997 and in Fuerzas Aliadas in Guatemala in 1997.

Intra-Caribbean Training Assistance

The defense forces of Guyana and Jamaica have assisted the BeDF with training. Between 1981 and 1997, fifteen officer cadets have graduated from the Colonel Ulric Pilgrim Cadet School at Camp Stephenson, Timehri, Guyana.²⁵ Glenn Arthurs was the first to do so (Gomes, 1995; *Stabroek News*, 1993; *Stabroek News*, 1994). In terms of more advanced training, Belizeans have completed the 13-week Staff and Command Course in Jamaica, designed by the Canadian forces for senior lieutenants and junior captains (Tomlinson, 1994). Earlier on, Lt. Col. Richard Eyles attended a short course in Jamaica.

Britain's Military Presence in Belize Beyond 1995

Prior to the departure of the British garrison, a British Army Training Support Unit Team was formed on 1 October 1994. Stationed at Airport Camp, which it shares with the BeDF, the role of the team is to advise, assist and provide administrative and logistics support to **Native Trail**, a company-level jungle exercise mounted from the United Kingdom and Germany (Silvester, 1996).²⁶ The unit also runs the British Forces Adventure Training Center in St. George's Cay and since 1995 the Royal Engineers led Military Works Team.

Additionally, the British presence in Belize includes a Royal Engineer Squadron of 150 men. This squadron is engaged in construction projects to improve the infrastructure of Airport Camp as well as carry out a number of community projects.²⁷ Also, though with reduced manpower, there is a British Army Support Unit Medical Center, as well as the "Gazelle" helicopters of the 25 Flight Army. These two entities respond to requests from the Government of Belize for casualty evacuation, and the helicopters provide important logistical support for the BeDF in the remote areas that are inaccessible by road (Silvester, 1996).²⁸ In addition, the West Indies Guard Ship provides naval support.

²³ Local aircrew training involves preabinito for potential pilots, co-pilots and conversion training, captaincy training and currency check rides.

²⁴ In 1990, a Lt. Col. was appointed as the first military and air attaché to the Embassy of Mexico. Since then, one brigadier general, three lieutenant colonels and three majors have been accredited to the mission.

²⁵ I am grateful to Major General (Ret.) Joseph Singh for supplying this information.

²⁶ Exercise Native Trail, which usually last for six weeks, is an ongoing series of jungle training. Typically, it consist of three days of acclimatization in Airport Camp, one week each on basic jungle training; one week each of intermediate jungle training and live firing on Mountain Pine Ridge and adventurous training at St. George's Caye. The exercise will normally finish with a final jungle phase of seven days, followed by post-exercise administration and local leave.

²⁷ One such project is assisting in the renovation of the Belize Zoo.

²⁸ The 25 Flight Army is primarily for the casualty evacuation of British military personnel and for the support of exercise Native Trail.

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Expenditure

The BDF is funded by three sources. In addition to local sources, the United Kingdom provides military assistance (Times of the Americans, 1988) and the USA offers help through a military aid program.²⁹ The U.S. Military Liaison Office is responsible for coordinating all U.S. military activities in Belize. In addition to the Foreign Military Sales Program, other programs are the Distinguished Visitor Program, the National Guard State Partnership Program, Unit and Personal Exchanges with the U.S. military, as well as the International Military Education and Training Program.³⁰ The last provides scholarships for BeDF soldiers to attend formal military courses in the U.S. (Doss 1977).

In 1982, defense spending in Belize accounted for only 4% of the GNP. However, in 1987, Belize spent 10% of its 1987-1988 national budget on defense (BZ\$22.64 million or US\$11.32 million). Most of this was spent on the development of a third rifle company as part of the announced expansion of the BeDF. In 1994, the defense budget dropped to BZ\$19.36 million or US\$9.68 million, which accounted for 3.5 percent of the budget. In 1996, the defense budget was BZ\$ 15, 53 million.³¹ Against the backdrop of a slash in the BeDF budget, it received a gift of \$475,000 in equipment in February 2001.

Roles

The BeDF protects the territorial sovereignty of the country, controls drug smuggling and infiltration of its borders by illegal immigrants, protects the fishing rights of Belizeans and guards against illegal logging. It also assists the government in several domestic projects. Finally, it has played a role in the peacekeeping in Haiti to restore President Aristide to power.

Threats to Security

Belize is the only country of the Commonwealth Caribbean in which armed forces are primarily responsible for external defense.³² In the past, the bulk of the responsibility for defending the country rested on British troops. The United Kingdom had a permanent military garrison in Belize from 1948 to 1995. After the departure of British troops, the BeDF assumed full responsibility for the entire defense of Belize in 1995.

The British military personnel, commanded by a Brigadier, comprised a ground force of an infantry battalion of about 700 men, an armored troop, one field artillery battery, and one engineer

²⁹ In respect of the last, a U.S. Military Liaison Office, subordinated to the U.S. Southern Command in Miami (formerly Panama), is located at Airport Camp and has served the BDF since 1982. Similar offices are found in most countries in the region and are normally referred to as U.S. Military Groups (USMILGP).

³⁰ The Foreign Military Sales Program provides grant funding for military clothes, ammunition, spares and equipment.

³¹ I am grateful to Francis Arana and Jaime Alpuche, Central Bank of Belize, February 1997.

³² Belize and Guyana are the only Commonwealth Caribbean countries with border disputes and a need to use their armed forces for defense. Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America, has border disputes with Venezuela and Suriname. In 2004, none existed with Brazil. However, unlike Belize, Guyana has no permanent deployment of troops at its border, except in special situations. The 1st battalion of the Guyana Defense Force, the only regular battalion responsible for both hinterland defense operations, is stationed at Camp Stephenson, Timehri. As the need arises, troops are deployed to Eteringband on the eastern bank of Cuyuni and elsewhere on the Venezuela border, as well as Lethem and elsewhere on the Brazilian border. Guyana and Suriname signed an agreement to demilitarize the New River Zone claimed by Venezuela, and therefore is not known to have troops on that part of the border. Moreover, since 1995, Guyana has scaled down its military to a more affordable force. Additionally, there has been a relative de-emphasis on military duties in favor of non-military functions, for example, the use of the army to fight crime, especially the narcotics trade; Dion E. Phillips, "The Military of Guyana" in Soldados y Ciudadanos en el Caribe, Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales, Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, 2002: 162 & 120.

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squadron. The Royal Air Force (RAF) included a flight of Harrier jets, four Pumas, three Gazelle helicopters and half a squadron (four fire units) of the RAF Regiment with Rapier missiles. Usually, aircrews were detached to Belize for two months at a time (Defense Committee, 1987-1988).

The RAF in Belize was smaller but more visible than the army. Pumas carried out regular support and supply runs to border outposts, and Harriers carried out frequent patrol missions along the border. Also, the RAF Hercules made regular flights to the Philip Goldson International Airport in order to bring the essential supplies that were needed to maintain the British forces there. These soldiers and airmen, who numbered approximately 1,600, were stationed at four camps. In addition, a vessel from the Royal Navy visited Belize and still does every six weeks. Hence, at any given time, substantial British military forces were stationed on Belize. These forces were stationed there to guarantee the territorial integrity of Belize against Guatemala's claims on the country, as well as to deter leftist rebel groups from using sparsely populated Belize as a base in their battle against the Guatemala government. The hosting of British troops in Belize also presented an unparalleled opportunity of realistic training that is of considerable value, even better than that of Borneo in south east Asia, a mecca for jungle training (Armed Forces, 1985).

Guatemalan Claim

Guatemala, through Spanish inheritance, claims rights over the sovereignty of Belize. Guatemala tried to prevent Belize's independence in 1972 by sending troops into the area. The British responded with their own force until the Organization of American States interceded. Again, in mid-1977, there was another threat from Guatemala, as its troops massed along the border it shares with Belize. Also, when Belize applied to join the United Nations in 1981, the vote to accept it was 130 to one, the only negative vote coming from Guatemala. However by August 1991, there had been a softening of the Guatemalan position, as borne out by its decision to recognize the sovereignty of Belize. Though the military was still in power in Guatemala, under U.S. pressure, elections took place and the democratization process had advanced to the point where the second civilian government was in place, headed by President Jorge Serrano. Also, the two countries established diplomatic relations in September, the following month. Nevertheless, Guatemala maintains some territorial claims over its neighbor ([Barbados Advocate](#), 1994).³³ British forces withdrew from Belize in 1995, although Belizean authorities continued to warn that Guatemala remained a threat to the country. British military spending accounted for about 15% of the national income, and the withdrawal had a negative economic impact. Guatemala's alleged change in policy to Belize provided Britain with the "window of opportunity" to withdraw.

Belize-Guatemala Relations and the Adjacency Zone

In light of Britain's wishes for Belize to play an increasing role in defending itself from Guatemala or from any other substantive threat for that matter, the BeDF was established in 1978, three years prior to Belize's independence. However, in spite of the improved security climate between Belize and Guatemala, as well as the growth and relative maturity of the BeDF in the ensuing years, Belize continued to request Britain's defense presence. Nevertheless, given the financial straits in which Britain found itself as well as its military commitments to collective security in Europe, the British gradually reduced its garrison in its former Caribbean colony of Belize and ultimately withdrew British Forces from Belize in 1995.

³³ This century-old claim was revisited in March 1994, when Guatemala's foreign minister Marithza Ruis de Vielmas sent a letter to United Nations' Secretary-General Boutros-Boutros Ghali. It stated that, "an interim agreement signed in July 1992 setting out Belize's land borders must not be taken as a renunciation of Guatemala's claim to Belizean territory." Regarding maritime boundaries, she said, "There are differences existing between Belize and Guatemala which can only be finally resolved by the conclusion of a treaty between the two countries," "Guatemala Revives Claim to Belize," [Barbados Advocate](#), 26 March 1994: 10.

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In the absence of British Forces Belize, the BeDF conducts a 24-hour operational patrol and manned observation posts for the purpose of identifying and reporting signs of movement across the border or any unusual activity. It also gathers information on normal activities in operational areas so that the unusual may be more easily detected. This familiarizes troops with operational areas, shows a military presence, maintains "tract" and related information, services helicopter-landing sites, and promotes goodwill among the civilian population.

On October 19, 1999, then Prime Minister Said Musa of the People's United Party learned that Guatemala wanted to openly state its claim to Belize once more. This time Guatemala wanted the dispute to move away from its claim of half of Belize to all or substantial parts of the country. In support of this view, Guatemala sent troops to its eastern border with Belize. This action revived tensions between the two countries, and on November 8, 2000, Belize and Guatemala created the Adjacency Zone. It is one kilometer wide on either side of the Adjacency line. Guatemala does not recognize the concept of a border with Belize but does the Adjacency line as a demarcation between Belize and Guatemala. The Adjacency Line is due north from Gracias a Dios, through Garbutt's Falls, to Aguas Turbias. The Adjacency Zone agreement states that settlers who resided in the zone prior to 1 October 2000 were to remain there, undisturbed, until both parties agree to extend it. The agreement also includes protocols for removing any settlers who venture into the zone after October 1, 2001.³⁴ At an emergency meeting in mid-January 2001, Belize and Guatemala agreed to assist the Pan American Institute of Geography and History (PAIGH), an Organization of American States (OAS) affiliate, to determine the coordinates of the reference markers and to identify the Adjacency Line and Adjacency Zone along the points. Belize and Guatemala also agreed to accept the Institute's findings as well as the decision of facilitators relative to the question of illegal settlements (alluded to in the coming subsection on the "Prevention of Illegal Immigrants"). The facilitators of the negotiations were Sir Shridath Ramphal (for Belize) and Paul Reichler (for Guatemala). However, these confidence-building measures went awry, and on August 25, 2003, the government of Guatemala advised the OAS that it had encountered difficulties with certain aspects of the proposals presented by the facilitators in September 2002. In so doing, Guatemala has since taken the position that the decisions of the facilitators are one-sided and has referred its dispute with Belize to the International Court of Justice in The Hague, Netherlands, to be resolved by legal means.³⁵

Internal Security

In March 1981, Great Britain and Guatemala reached agreement on certain issues that cleared the way for the Belize's independence. Violent demonstrations followed as citizens there felt that the British Government had not considered fully enough the legitimate security interests. From March to May, the country was under a State of Emergency, at which time the BeDF helped to maintain law and order in Belize City, including extinguishing fires (Arthur, 1981, Amandala, 1981).³⁶

On May 8, 1991, five farmers from the Mennonite religious community were kidnapped by a group of eight from a Spanish Lookout near the Guatemalan border. A \$US 100, 000 ransom was demanded, but the farmers were released after a massive search

³⁴ The Belize-Guatemala Territorial Differendum Proposals from the facilitators were presented to the Secretary of the Organization of American States, Cesar Gaviria, on 30 August 2002. Along with land issues (including the village of Santa Rosa, east of the Boundary Line), the proposals addressed the Territorial Seas, the establishment of the Belize-Guatemala-Honduras Ecological Park, the Development Trust Fund as well as Trade, Investment and Functional Cooperation; http://www.belize.gov.bz/features/belize_guatemala_differendum.html 1-10

³⁵ Personal Communication with Gabriel Aguilera, Guatemala's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Santiago, Chile on 29 October 2003.

³⁶ The BeDF was deployed under the overall command of Major Oswald Gillette. On the occasion, no. 1, 2 and 3 platoons of A company were under the command of three second lieutenants, namely, Earl Arthurs, Henry Baizar and Leonidez Yama, respectively.

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by a joint BeDF/Police party with the use of ground and aerial reconnaissance (Amandala, 1991). The BeDF was again activated on the occasion of a strike by the United Banana Workers Union at the Fyrees Company in Stann Creek, southern Belize. In August 60 soldiers and police officers were used to round up and deport banana workers, thus breaking their strike in 1995 (Amandala, 1996).

Still another intervention took place on Monday, 30 July 2001, when the BeDF was again deployed. This was triggered by a delay in the renewal of permits for the Tillet and Castillo buses to transport their northern passengers to Belize City. This conflict resulted in a violent confrontation between bus riders and a BeDF-police party on the Tower Hill Bridge, at Mile 50 on the Northern Highway. After two BeDF soldiers were injured, Captain John Boland and two others opened fire, resulting in injury. Two civilians were shot, and several others, including 9 BeDF officers, were wounded (Chavaria, 2001; Flores, 2001).

Beginning in 1996, the police routinely have been calling on the BeDF to provide support twice a year. The first is during the festive period of national celebration in September and the second during the Yuletide Season. This is done to mitigate the effects of crime on Belizeans for both residents and visitors. Operations are mostly carried out by the resident infantry battalion and the force support group. They are deployed from the Eastern Division Police Force station and involve foot and vehicle patrols for 24 hours per day (Smith, 2001).³⁷ In 1997, the BeDF responded to two prison service requests within six months to assist in recapturing escaped prisoners, and in September of that year, the BeDF launched a manhunt in support of the police for notorious Winsworth "Winty" Mangar (Amandala, 1998). In addition to the above, a BeDF officer serves as the aide-de-camp for the Governor General of Belize, in his capacity as commander-in-chief.³⁸ The aide-de-camp's duties include personal security, serving as escort officer and as translator.

Prevention of Drug Smuggling

British forces and the BeDF, in conjunction with the US, have been active in the Belize marijuana eradication program, which included excursions into the fields and physically hacking down the marijuana plants. Marijuana is cultivated mostly in the North and West of Belize, on small plots of one acre or less. Significant cultivation began in the 1960s, and by early 1980s Belize was the fourth largest supplier of the crop after Colombia, Mexico and Jamaica. The Belize government, with help from Mexico and the US, in 1982 began spraying that continued in 1983.³⁹ In 1984, the BeDF destroyed up to 20% of the marijuana crop, about one million plants. However, environmentalists, farmers and others became worried about the toxic effects of paraquat, and

³⁷ In 2001, unlike previous years, soldiers did not carry guns, probably in an effort to avoid a reoccurrence of an incident in April 1999, involving a BeDF soldier, Thomas Chi, who shot Rodwell Tasher with his M-16 rifle and almost killed him. This event was the first recorded incident in which a soldier on patrol with the police shot a civilian while acting in defense of the police.

³⁸ Between 1980 and 2001, Belize has had three heads of state who simultaneously serve as the country's commander-in-chief, namely, Sir James Hennesy (1980-1981), Dame Minita Gordan (1981-1993) and Sir Coville Young (1993-Present). I am grateful to Amelia Poornananda, Office of the Governor General, Belmopan, Belize, for this information, 6 December 1995.

³⁹ A publication by the name of "Supercream" on 26 November 1991, reported that the BeDF was used in the initial months but was under the command of corrupt officers who took bribes from the big ganjeros. However, six helicopters piloted by Americans and Mexicans sprayed Orange Walk weed fields with paraquat, a serious poison (Supercream, 1982). It was also noted that the U.S. Federal Government sprayed a few fields with paraquat in the state of Georgia on Friday, 12 August 1983 possibly in an attempt to convince Latin American nations that the deadly chemical is safe to use. However, the U.S. Supreme Court ordered a halt to the spraying. Paraquat is a chemical component that some sectors argued destroyed other valuable agricultural crops along with the marijuana (Belize Times, 1985).

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spraying was stopped in 1984, an election year, by the then George Price government after protests that other crops (sugar and maize) were being affected.⁴⁰

In 1985, when Curl Thompson, the then Minister of Home Affairs of the Esquivel-led government, threatened to arrest the top figures involved in drug trafficking and gave the go ahead for the resumption of aerial spraying, his life was threatened by drug barons (M. Estrada, 1985; Belize Times, 1985)⁴¹ Spraying eventually resumed in 1986 when the new government took power (Sharma, 1986). Prime Minister Esquivel stated that the "marijuana industry had become all-powerful and it was a real threat to the independence of that country – a more urgent danger than the Guatemalan claim." (Young, 1986; Manning, 1987).

The manual and aerial crop destruction was so successful that in 1994, the U.S. Department of State boasted: "Belize, once the fourth largest producer of marijuana in the world, has reduced production to negligible levels through an aggressive aerial eradication campaign using U.S. Government spray aircraft and GOB (Government of Belize) manual eradication operations" (International Narcotics Control Strategy Report, 1994; Griffith, 1996). However, the BeDF's first involvement in joint anti-narcotic operations with the police in the eradication of drugs was in 1995 during operation code-named "Ocean Cordon." This took place at Orange Walk, San Pedro and in Corozal. Again, in 1996, the BeDF, local police and foreign law enforcement agencies, carried out anti-narcotic operations in the Chiquibul Forest Reserve.

Also, in view of the fact that Belize's long, uninhabited shoreline is ideal for small craft engaged in drug trafficking, several boats have been caught jammed with cocaine. One such incident took place on the 24 March 1997, when a team consisting of BeDF soldiers, Fisheries and Customs department officials and members of the Police Dragon Unit, in an operation labeled "Ides of March" intercepted and seized over 1,300 kilos of cocaine. It was packed in 52 sacks containing 1, 250 parcels (Amandala, 1997).

In March of the following year, the BeDF and the police discovered and destroyed a small plantation that contained 300 marijuana plants in the vicinity of Eyles Camp. The Air Wing is better able to identify many of the marijuana plantations that are difficult to locate on the ground and was responsible for the discovery of over 90, 000 marijuana plants in 1999.⁴² The maritime unit works closely with the U.S. Coast Guard and the West Indian guard ship in counter-drug operations. In regard to the former, Belize signed the **Ship Rider Agreement** on 23 December 1992, giving the U.S. leeway to enter Belizean territorial waters to intercept U.S. bound cocaine and ganja shipments (Blenman, 1900). Belize also has an agreement with Mexico for improved narcotic cooperation, including intelligence exchange and Mexican assistance with prevention, rehabilitation and crop eradication.

Prevention of Illegal Immigration

Belize has a population of 250,000, but it is believed that there are another 80,000 illegal immigrants from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, including those recognized by the U.N. High Commission for Refugees. This has been a problem for the government of Belize and has resulted in the need for the BeDF to work closely with Belize's Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as with the Forestry Department. Also, there have been at least two cases of Cubans attempting to enter Belize illegally.

⁴⁰ It is believed in some quarters that the loss of the 1984 elections by Prime Minister George Price and the People's United Party was due partly to anger generated by aggrieved farmers.

⁴¹ In a radio and television exercise "Face the Nation" on 10 April, Curl Thompson stated that he was satisfied that members of the court, the public service and police were involved and had been recipients of bribes, in the drug business.

⁴² Boland, Cedric "Belize Defence Force Operations 1999," *The Belizean Soldier*, vol. 1, no. 8, July 2000: 6.

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In August 1992, a group of Guatemalans settled on Belizean territory in the remote Rio Blanco area in the Chiquibul Reserve. These Guatemalans may have been unaware that they were in Belize as the border is poorly marked. And so, a government release stated that the 18 families were being given "an appropriate time" to respond after being officially informed that they were on Belizean territory. The release indicated, "should they choose to remain in Belize, the villagers must follow proper procedure in applying for provisional residency and fly the flag" (Jamaica Daily Gleaner, 1992).

Two years later in July 1994, an estimated 1,000 Guatemalan families were discovered living and farming at Machquilla Village. This particular area of settlement, a remote western border region inside Belize, is a joint forest reserve between Belize and Guatemala where settlement is restricted even to nationals of either country. The Guatemalans had burnt more than 1,000 acres of forest in preparation to plant. Prime Minister Manuel Esquivel accused the Guatemalan government and military of systematically encouraging Guatemalan nationals to settle in Belizean territory. He took a swipe at the British, saying that British forces (then resident in Belize) appeared reluctant to deal with Belizean government requests to help in aerial patrols and airlifts to the areas occupied by Guatemalan incursions.

Figure 2 shows that, even though the Adjacency Zone (alluded to in the earlier sub-section entitled "Belize-Guatemala Relations and the Adjacency Zone") was established in November 2000 to avoid tension and build confidence, both Belize and Guatemala continued to accuse each other of violating the agreement.

Figure 2: Examples of Violations of the Adjacency Zone – Real or Perceived, 2000-2001

table

In the case of the Rio Blanco settlement, cited in Figure 2, a media campaign in Guatemala succeeded in creating a mood of hostility in which the army was called upon to protect the citizens of Guatemala. Also, the government informed its counterpart in Belize of intelligence reports which claimed that the BeDF was preparing to take hostile action against Guatemala during the 2001 Christmas season.

In respect of the Machaquela settlement, when Belize, in accordance with the November 2000 Agreement, invited the Guatemalan Human Rights Commissioner to witness the removal of the settlers, the government of Guatemala denied the request and asked that the matter be referred to the facilitators. The atmosphere of tension was such that a newspaper headline in Guatemala declared that, "Peten is on a War Footing", and the Acting Foreign Minister of Guatemala went so far as to declare that, "the army, if necessary, will not let down the defenseless people of Guatemala." Additionally, a Guatemalan army spokesman declared that the army was "ready to go into action to defend the state's sovereignty."⁴³ As it turned out, it was later determined by the PAIGH that the Guatemalan settlements at Rio Blanco, Machaquila (or Tres Fuentes) as well as Valentin Camp, a third contested village, were all located outside the Adjacency zone, on the eastern side. In fact, only one dwelling located in the Valentin Camp was determined by PAIGH to be in the Zone.⁴⁴

In addition to Guatemalans, Cubans were also found in violation of Belize's immigration laws. In March 1996, twenty-three Cubans from a camp in the Cayman Islands landed at the Ramada Hotel Pier in two small boats and were taken into custody and kept at the BeDF Barracks at Camp Belizario in Central Farm until April 5, where round-the-clock security was provided by the BeDF's echo company. The Cubans were initially cooperative; however, after

⁴³ "Prime Minister Explains Miami Plan of Action", http://www.belize.gov.bz/features/joint_meeting/pm.html: 1-12.

⁴⁴ "Illegal Guatemalan Settlement Outside Adjacency Zone." The Belize Times, 18 February 2001: 30.

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they were denied refugee status, they began an 8-day hunger strike. Eventually, under Immigration, Police and BeDF escort, they were transported to the Philip S.W. Goldson International Airport to board a Cubana Airlines plane for Cuba.

One week later, on Tuesday, 2 May 1996, ten Cubans drifted ashore on Dead man's Caye in Turneffe Atoll. They were held at Goff's Caye (12 miles southeast of Belize City) while the two wooden boats were repaired and made seaworthy. An eleven-man BeDF squad was posted to ensure that no members of the press or public disembarked on the cay (Amandala, 1995).⁴⁵

Illegal Logging and Fishing Rights

The BeDF conducts spot checks for illegal logging operations along the Guatemalan border. In March 1993, logs were felled by civilian bandits in the Peten territory of Guatemala and were transported over the border on Belize's western border near Gallon Jug. They were found by the Multi-Agency Patrol, which included the police, customs, forestry, immigration and the BeDF (Amandala, 1993).

The Maritime Wing has assisted in protecting Belize's territorial waters. This includes maintaining a pollution-free environment, deterring illegal fishing particularly in the southern waters, as well as search and rescue at sea. This surveillance includes the Sapodilla Cays, a string of tiny islets that restrict Guatemala's access to the sea from its short Caribbean coastline, including its southern port of Porto Barrios. In 1991, when Guatemala recognized Belize's independence, there was an arrangement for joint sovereignty over the Sapodilla Cays.

This limits Belize's territorial waters in the south to three miles, but it extends to 12 miles for the rest of the coastline as allowed under international law. In 1997, the air wing began working in conjunction with the maritime wing to locate and report foreign vessels fishing illegally in Belizean waters.

Relief during Natural and Other Disasters

The BeDF, through the Office of Disaster Preparedness, provides relief and rescue services to civilian populations in times of hurricanes, floods and fires.⁴⁶ It was very much involved in Hurricane Greta on 18 September 1978, when regulars and B Co. volunteers assisted the Belize City authorities, while D Co. volunteers carried out a similar task in Dangriga (The New Belize, 1978). In the case of Hurricane Janet, detachments were sent to the badly affected areas of Sittee River, Gales Point Village and Mullins River Village.

Also, during the floods of Cayo, in December 1979, the BeDF was tasked to help take provisions to the isolated communities of Bullet Tree, Santa Familia and Spanish Lookout. Again in 1995, Hurricane Roxanne brought heavy rains to Belize. The Rio Hondo River, which forms Belize's northern border with Mexico, was flooded.⁴⁷ In cooperation with the civilian authorities, Echo Company evacuated residents and secured the affected area. Also, when a reconnaissance team confirmed that the flooded riverbank was continuing to rise, a crew from the Maritime Wing with a rubber inflatable boat joined in the operation by conducting shuttle runs up the river. Echo Company was committed to the operation for an entire month after the water subsided. It supported the National Fire Service and the Health Department in disinfecting villages (Mossiah, 1996). Since Roxanne in 1995, the BeDF has responded to three other hurricanes, Mitch in 1998,

⁴⁵ An attempt by Audrey Matura of Television Station Channel 7 to interview the refugees was physically rebuffed by the security forces. Also the deportation drew angry protest from Cuban-American exiles in Florida who demonstrated.

⁴⁶ Interestingly, it was a result of the devastation of Hurricane Hattie in 1961 that the government of Belize was persuaded to move the administrative center of the country from the port of Belize City to Belmopan.

⁴⁷ Affected villages were Blue Creek, Douglas, San Roman, San Antonio, Campechito and Santa Cruz (Mossiah, 1995).

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Keith in 2000, and Iris in 2001, all in the month of October. As a result of Mitch, the BeDF's second battalion, the air wing and the volunteer were involved in the biggest evacuation ever witnessed in Belize's history. The Maritime Wing did quite a number of rescue operations from various cays in the Belize District. The two BeDF vessels stationed in Hunting Caye evacuated 112 persons from San Pedro, Caye Caulker and other cays. The force was also tasked by the NEMO to assist in food preparation and delivery – some 500 persons were provided breakfast, lunch, supper and snacks by the force's catering department. With respect to Hurricane Keith, the hardest hit areas were San Pedro, a tourist resort in Amergris Caye and Cay Caulker (Barbados Advocate, 2001).

Over the years, the **British Forces, Belize**, has taken part in relief operations in other Commonwealth Caribbean countries, namely, Jamaica in 1988 after Hurricane Gilbert (Medhurst, 1988) and Bahamas in 1992 after Hurricane Andrew. However, as of 2001, the BeDF is yet to provide relief to another Commonwealth Caribbean country, though it has given assistance to its neighbor Honduras in the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch. A section of the BeDF's combat engineers, along with other members of the force, were sent to Honduras to assist Honduras in its clean up.

A massive forest fire raged through the Mountain Pine Ridge in Central Belize in April 1991. The fire, which burned from the Baldy Beacon Range to the Macal River Valley, was tackled by the Forestry Department's fire fighters, who were assisted by 100 members of the British Forces and about 60 from the BeDF (Amandala, 1991).

Assistance to Government Projects

The BeDF has been involved in a large share of government projects. These include the construction and renovation of buildings (including school buildings); as well as improving roads, playground and parks.

For example, No. 2 platoon of the BDF constructed a playground and painted the school at Burrell Boom Village. Also, similar projects were undertaken by Platoons 2 and 3 at the Pine Ridge School and the Ladyville Roman Catholic School. In September 1994, Foxtrot Company was involved in community projects as well as the organization of the Military and Fire Service Tattoo for the San Ignacio Town Board.

Again, the BeDF, in conjunction with the ministries of Works, Education and Health, have worked closely with the U.S. Army Engineers to build school buildings, improve roads, provide free medical screening and treatment for thousands of Belizeans. Also, with the equipment that was gifted to the BeDF by the British Forces Engineers, its engineers engage in road construction. The BeDF has also provided training assistance to the Belize Police Force, the Prison Department and the Customs and Immigration Departments during the period.

Self-Support Activities

The BeDF is involved in several self-support projects, including a pig farm, housing for soldiers and a pre-school and day care center. The pig farm was started in 1996, with the intent of generating revenue that would contribute to the BeDF Welfare Fund for the benefit of all soldiers. From a start of six sows and a boar, the farm had a total of 98 pigs in 1997.⁴⁸

Beginning in 1996, the BeDF Housing Group began providing housing for soldiers. Initially, twenty-five lots of land were acquired. Then, a further 27 were surveyed and in the third phase, an additional 153 lots were distributed. Beyond this and in view of the demand, a plot of 60 acres

⁴⁸ It was built under the direction of Major (Ret.) John Loskot and with assistance from the superintendent of prisons, camp maintenance and the volunteers.

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of land was leased to the BeDF for further subdivision into lots for members. In 1997, up to 45 houses were so far built (Borland, 1997).

The Valgarten Pre-School and Day Care Center, constructed in September 1995 (using funds from a private donor), is located in what was previously the Officers Mess. In 1997, it had a staff of four, all BeDF wives, and a student enrollment of 20. The BeDF also started the "Families Shop" at Price Barrack for its own use and other members of the force.

Other self-support projects in which the BeDF has been involved are its own museum (Benguche, 1999), library, canteen, as well as the refurbishing of parks.

One other way in which the BeDF assists government is that the Force Hospital, which provides medical attention to the BeDF and their families, also accommodate emergencies from Ladyville and surrounding areas.⁴⁹

Overseas Operations

The BeDF's only over sea's operation has been to Haiti to restore President Aristide to power. (Jones, 1996). In 1994, Belize was part of Caribbean Battalion I, II, III and IV drawn from six other CARICOM countries, namely, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, Guyana, Antigua and Barbuda and the Bahamas. The battalions served in Haiti from 12 September 1994 to January 1996. The first two Battalions were under the command of the U.S.-led multinational force and the last two were under the auspices of the United Nations Mission in Haiti.

BeDF soldiers, under the leadership of Captain Juan Teck, were part of CARICOM I whose Contingent Commander was Lt. Col. Linton Graham, Jamaica Defense Force. They were stationed first in southern Haiti and later at Cap Haitien in the north. Between October and December, they were in charge of security operations at the main port complex and surrounding areas where the U.S. landed equipment and supplies for 21,000 forces; assisted in the repatriation of over 6,000 Haitians from Guantanamo Bay, Cuba and the Bahamas; mounted a buy-back program which yielded more that 800 weapons and adopted a public school, the Ecola National Republique in Bols Petite. On the return of the first batch in December, seven of its members were awarded medals of achievement.

The second contingent of BeDF soldiers, under the leadership of Major Reynolds Lewis departed for Puerto Rico to conduct training on 28 November 1994 before being deployed to Haiti on 10 December. They too were stationed at Cap Haitien, a city about 400 km north of Port-au-Price. Seven of its members were awarded medals of achievement and returned home to a motorcade through the principal streets of Belize on 13 March 1995 that ended up in a reception at the Militia Hall in Belize City.

Unlike the first two contingents that served for three-month stints, the third and fourth were deployed directly from home countries to Haiti. Training which familiarized the soldiers with their areas of operations was conducted in the theatre. In Les Cayes, the forces engaged in synchronized training. However, the role of CARICOM III was to provide aid to the civil powers. In specific terms, this entailed VIP escorts, convoy and foot patrols as well as assisting with the preparation for the elections.

Lt. Col. Hubert Cain of the Belize Defense Force commanded CARICOM IV. Belize also had a contingent stationed at Genoives and participated in peacekeeping and civil duties. In

⁴⁹ The BeDF Hospital was established in 1992 and operates on a twenty-four hour rotation. The hospital's operating theater is in service to the BeDF and the general public. There is a medical staff of three doctors, a medical administrator, two civilian nurses, a physiotherapist and a laboratory technician.

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regards to the latter, members built furniture for a local school in Les Cayes; cleaned the interior and exterior of a church and were instrumental in the beautification of a garden.

Conclusion

The Belize military, the Belize Defense Force (BeDF), comprising three land commands and a maritime wing, started prior to independence to assist and ultimately replace the resident British forces in Belize. Its main function was the defense of Belize against neighboring Guatemala. By so doing, Belize is the only country of the English-speaking Caribbean in which the military is used primarily for external defense. Guyana, the only English-speaking country in South America, has border disputes with Venezuela and Suriname. However, unlike Belize, it has no permanent deployment of troops at its border, except in special situations.

In light of Belize's vast interior and its experiences with encroachment of its sovereignty, particularly the infiltration of its border by illegal immigrants from Guatemala, the BeDF provided, among other things, jungle training designed to assess and upgrade the operational readiness of the force. Also, the BeDF became increasingly involved in "police" operations, including the combating of drugs and maintaining order, thus leading to a blurring of the roles of the police and the military. Finally, Belize's military engaged in self-help programs and performed tasks normally done by civil organizations and was therefore used in a civil military defense role.

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- XX The Belize-Guatemala Territorial Differendum Proposals from the facilitators were presented to the Secretary of the Organization of American States, Cesar Gaviria on 30 August 2002. Along with Land issues (including the village of Santa Rosa, east of the Boundary Line), the proposals addressed the Territorial Seas, the establishment of the Belize-Guatemala-Honduras Ecological Park, the Development Trust Fund as well as Trade, Investment and Functional Cooperation; http://www.belize.gov.bz/features/belize_guatemala_differendum.html 1-10.
- XX On October 7, 2003, Lawrence Sylvester, Belize's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and his Guatemalan counterpart Gabriel Aguilera met at the Organization of American States (OAS), Washington, D.C. to review the implementation of the confidence-building measures with Luigi R. Einaudi, Assistant Secretary of the OAS; "Belize & Guatemala build trust...but Guatemalan electoral violence not good," <http://www.belizereporter.bz>, 17 October 2003:1-2.
- XX Personal Communication with Gabriel Aguilera, Guatemala's Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hyatt Regency Hotel, Santiago, Chile, 29 October 2003.

XX "Prime Minister Explains Miami Plan of Action,"
http://www.belize.gov.bz/feaures/joint_meeting/pm.html: 1-12.

According to the November 2000 agreement, when settlers are found in Adjacency Zone, a Joint Commission from Guatemala is to take a census of the people in question and advise them they must move to new locations west of the Adjacency line. This action must be carried out within 8 days of signing of the agreement in Washington, D.C. The Guatemalan government will compensate all settlers who comply for their crops and buildings. The Belizean government will move those who do not.

XX "Illegal Guatemalan Settlement Outside Adjacency Zone." The Belize Times, 18 February 2001: 30.

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¹ Griffith, Ivelaw Drugs and Security in the Caribbean: Sovereignty Under Siege, The Pennsylvania State University Press, Pennsylvania 1999: 32-24; Payne, Anthony “The Belize Triangle: Relations with Britain, Guatemala and the United States,” Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs, volume 32, no. 1, Spring, 1990: 119-136.

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² Known as British Honduras until it gained independence from Britain in 1981, Belize occupies a strip of land 174 miles (280 km) wide on the eastern side of the Yucatan Peninsula between Guatemala and Mexico. The country is located on the north-east coast of Central America and is bordered on the east by the Bay of Honduras (on the Caribbean Sea), on the south west by Guatemala, and on the north and north west by Mexico. The coast is swampy while the interior is dominated by tropical jungle growth.

³ In addition to Belize, three other Commonwealth Caribbean countries established regular defence forces prior to independence. There are Dominica (1975) under Premier Patrick John – three years before independence; Grenada (1951) under Premier Eric Gairy –23 years before independence and St. Kitts and Nevis (1967) by Premier Robert Bradshaw – 15 years before independence.