

TALK, TALK, TALK

Geraldo, Oprah and Phil are ratings winners in Triad Life & Leisure, B1

POTHOLES

State to smooth i-85's rough road City & State, D1



Partly cloudy with west wind at 10 mph, high near 40. Wednesday: High 37; low 12

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25 Cents

Noriega eludes U.S. troops

Noriega: 'A fighter' on the run

By ELAINE SCOLINO
WASHINGTON — For more than two and a half years, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega enraged, embarrassed and eluded the grasp of two successive administrations.

His attorneys said Wednesday that Noriega, who was in hiding as more than 20,000 U.S. troops stormed through Panama, may never be captured.

"He's a fighter," said Miami attorney Raymond Takiff, who said he talked with his client Monday evening and remained in contact with the general's aides Wednesday. "I feel unhappy secure in my belief that he will be killed, he will not be captured. Should that occur, the truth will never come out."

The general, with his intense nationalism and anti-Americanism, "his ambition and shrewdness, came to represent all that the United States found offensive in a leader."

He was accused of shredding the results of an election last May, making millions through drug deals and money laundering, spying against the United States, slaying his political enemies. President Bush has portrayed him as the bad guy in a pulp crime novel, a Latin American "narco-terrorist" corrupting the youth of America.

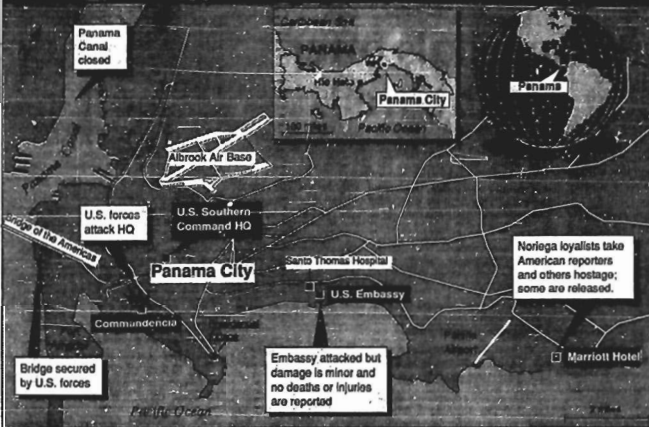
He resisted pleas that he relinquish power, rejected promises of safe haven in a third country, spurned threats of U.S. military intervention, survived intense economic pressure and diplomatic censure and defied indictments on drug-trafficking charges in American courts. In short, Noriega dared to challenge the image of the United States as a world power.

Wednesday's invasion may end a battle between Bush and Noriega that dates from last year's American presidential race. As part of a campaign of psychological warfare against Bush, Noriega spread the word that he had something on Bush that would prevent the United States from moving against Panama.

Bush also was plagued by speculation that the Reagan administration knew about Noriega's involvement in drug trafficking and money laundering for several years and did nothing to stop it.

When an embarrassing photo of a 1983 meeting between Bush and Noriega in Panama City surfaced last year, Panamanian opposition leaders said the meeting was to discuss money laundering of drug profits through Panama while Bush aides called it a routine stopover to discuss drug interdiction efforts. (See Noriega, A11)

Panama invaded



THE AMERICAN TROOPS sent against Panamanian military bases at 1 a.m. Wednesday moved in relative secrecy and carried out simultaneous attacks. "Operation Just Cause" included 13,000 U.S. troops stationed in Panama. 7,000 troops sent there overnight and an additional 500 airlifted over the course of this day.

Key invasion objectives include Fort Sherman, Colon, Galofa Is., Gamboa, Soldiers jailed for taking part in October anti-Noriega coup freed, Madden Dam, Fort Clayton, Panama City, Fort Amador, Fort Kobbe, Howard AFB, Fort Davis, Fune Eapinar, Fort Sherman, Madden Dam, Fort Clayton, Panama City, Fort Amador, Fort Kobbe, Howard AFB, Fort Davis, Fune Eapinar, Fort Sherman.

From Wire Reports

PANAMA CITY, Panama — A massive U.S. invasion force Wednesday overthrew the regime of Panamanian strongman Manuel A. Noriega and installed a new president, chasing Noriega into hiding with an air and infantry assault that left at least 15 American GI's dead, 89 wounded and one missing. One U.S. civilian, a woman, was reported slain.

Noriega's loyalists seized some Americans during the day and by nightfall sporadic gunfire was heard as armed thugs roamed city streets. In Washington, the Bush administration offered a \$1 million reward for the military ruler who defied a superpower, saying, "We have de-capitalized him from the dictatorship." Supporters of Noriega also were offered \$150 for each firearm they surrendered.

Noriega spoke briefly Wednesday night over the national radio network and declared, "We're in trench warfare now and we will maintain the resistance."

He saluted Panamanians fighting the American invasion, saying, "We must resist and advance. We ask the world for help, with men, dignity, and strength. ... Our slogan is to win or die, not one step back." The station went off the air right

INSIDE

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after Noriega's remarks and his whereabouts still could not be determined. Whether he had substantial forces under his command was not clear.

Significant fighting in the city ended by 4 p.m. although one resident said explosions in the area of the pro-Noriega station caused the radio to go off the air when the radio tower was struck shortly after the Noriega broadcast. The resident said the station itself had not been damaged by the blast.

As airlifted troops prepared to (See Panama, A10)

Prolonged stay risky for troops

By TOM REBBURN

WASHINGTON — Now that U.S. forces have scored a quick military victory in Panama, what do they do next?

The danger facing American troops during the next few weeks and months, military analysts said Wednesday, is that the new civilian government headed by President Guillermo Endara may not be strong enough to rule on its own, that could push the United States, whose pre-invasion force of about

Analysis

13,000 troops in Panama is responsible solely for protecting the canal, into the unwanted role of a long-term army of occupation.

"The future risks are tremendous," said John Roberts, a Panama expert who served as general counsel on the Senate Armed Services Committee when the Panama Canal treaties were ratified in 1978.

"The worst possible scenario (See Analysis, A11)

For journalists, job becomes ordeal as pro-Noriega gunmen seize hotel

By LINDSEY GRUSON

PANAMA CITY, Panama — The first reports of shooting came just before midnight. Within minutes, heavy explosions, muffled by the distance, echoed through the steel and glass canyons of the capital. Then the noise died down. At the window of a room on the second floor of the cabana area of the Marriott Hotel, I listened with two other reporters for more sounds of fighting when we saw a man

wearing a black ski mask and camouflage pants and carrying an automatic assault rifle running across the patio area outside. We crouched to the floor, but the gunman spotted us. "Out! Out!" he shouted, aiming his AK-47 assault rifle. "We're coming!" we shouted through the open patio window. "We don't have any weapons!" We walked to the door.



Gruson

Lindsey Gruson is a former Greensboro resident and former staff writer for the Greensboro News & Record.

"You see, I'm not interested in your money," he said, returning the wallet to Brooks. Then he ordered them to go to the lobby. "We've been ordered to take hos-

(See Scene, A12)



U.S. soldiers stand guard to protect Panamanian residents hiding in a ditch during Wednesday's fighting

Grieving father fights for highway safety

By TAFT WIREBACK

SILER CITY — Jack Wilhoit wants the answer to just one question about the death of his 13-year-old daughter, Elaine. He wants to know why the company he holds responsible is still allowed to operate trucks in North Carolina. Elaine died July 17 in a crash on U.S. 421, near Staley, when a tractor trailer owned by Dave Carter & Associates jackknifed in her path on a rain-slick highway.

Wilhoit, backed by the Highway Patrol officer who investigated the wreck, believes it happened because the truck had bald tires on its rear axle. Wilhoit's launched an effort for tougher laws against companies that cause serious accidents by ignoring basic truck maintenance. In fact, the Florida-based Carter firm had a questionable truck-safety record in North Carolina at least two years before the wreck on U.S. 421.

"If this is a hole in the law, it's a big one and it needs to be filled," Wilhoit, of Siler City, said Wednesday. "It needs to be filled because if it isn't, I guarantee you this will happen again to somebody else."

"If this is a hole in the law, it's a big one and it needs to be filled. It needs to be filled because if it isn't, I guarantee you this will happen again to somebody else."

— Jack Wilhoit

again to somebody else. "I guarantee that. And I don't want anyone to go through what I've had to deal with." The truck driver, Cedric Richmond of Mebane, pleaded guilty to careless and reckless driving in Chatham District Court. He was sentenced three weeks ago to a five-year suspended jail term and given a \$500 fine. Last month, the Carter firm paid Wilhoit \$600,000 to avoid a wrongful-death suit. Elaine's mother, Janice Wilhoit, said the family agreed to an out-of-court settlement with Carter because lawyers advised them they'd have to prove the company continued to use the bad tires with "malicious intent" to cause harm.

"They said that's very difficult to prove in court," she said. But Jack Wilhoit believes the company hasn't been punished severely enough.

"They continue to operate," he said. "They have insurance to cover what they paid me."

The Carter firm is an electrical-supply wholesaler based in Ocala, Fla. It operates 24 trucks and has a warehouse in Burlington, in addition to similar facilities in Florida, Alabama, Georgia and Pennsylvania. Since 1987, North Carolina truck-safety inspectors have checked six Carter trucks in random, roadside inspections. Four were forced out of service for serious safety violations, including brake-line air leaks, tire problems and broken turn signals.

In fact, six months before Elaine's death, the truck that killed her was ordered off the road for having a flat trailer tire, a leaking air line and an alarm on the rear trailer axle. Brakes on heavy trucks are operated by compressed air.

Richmond was driving the truck both the (See Wreck, A14)

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Today's Chuckle
Adolescence is that time of life when a boy refuses to believe that someday he'll be as dumb as his father.



Janice and Jack Wilhoit with a picture of their daughter, Elaine