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Written in Blood

The Story of the Haitian People

1492-1971

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most of the plotters, had received American training. At the same time, there began systematic arrests and roundup of retired or former officers and their families, who were thrown into Fort Dimanche as hostages for the future behavior of the Armed Forces. While this was going on, about 15 April, Clément Barbot, who had been living very quietly at home since release from prison, slipped out of his house in Déprez and, joined by certain trusty friends of earlier times, went underground.

April 22 opened a new national fête, the Month of Gratitude, during which the Haitian people were called upon to express their gratitude to François Duvalier for all the good things he had done.

A first, if unexpected, expression of feeling toward the president came on 26 April. That morning, as a palace limousine delivered two Duvalier children, Simone, aged fourteen, and Jean-Claude, twelve, at the Methodist College Bird, where they went to school, another car slowed alongside. Three shots were fired: each found its mark, killing the driver and two Macoute bodyguards. The children, scampering inside the schoolyard, were not fired on.

Clément Barbot, the one man who knew enough of Duvalier's methods to fight him, had struck his first blow. With characteristic precision — he loved children and knew the Duvalier youngsters well — he had shot the Macoutes only.

The spasm that seized Duvalier can be compared only with the insensate rages of Hyppolite. The events that followed can be likened only to 1915. Soldiers and TTMs combed Port-au-Prince, arresting at random, firing weapons in savage panic. Under shoot-to-kill orders with regard to any retired or former military officers, they gunned down Captain Albert Poitevien, former Garde-Côtes commandant, on his doorstep. Many hundreds of arrests were made of men, women, and children; all were hustled off to Fort Dimanche. Hardly any ever emerged. One among many never seen again was Colonel Edouard Roy, Haiti's pioneer aviator. Motorists driving cars of the same make as the original attackers' were shot in the streets and their vehicles riddled.

At the height of his frenzy, Duvalier, not yet aware that Barbot was involved, conceived the idea that the marksman who had picked off the Macoutes could only be former Lieutenant François Benoît, one of the stars of the recently abolished rifle team, who was among those purged in the preceding days. That Benoît had been in asylum inside the Dominican embassy when the attack was executed was ignored. Commanded by the sinister Major Romain, a swarm of Macoutes and Presidential Guard dashed up to the Benoît home in Bois Verna, opening fire as they deployed. The first bursts of automatic weapons gunned down

Benoît's aged father, a retired judge, and his mother and a friend on the front porch. The servants and even the family dogs were killed. The house, battered by hundreds of rounds, was doused with kerosene and then set on fire. Benoît's baby son, Gérard, died in his crib as flames consumed the old gingerbread house. Mme. Benoît, still teaching school though advanced in pregnancy, was warned and got away to the Ecuadorean embassy before Macoutes attacked the schoolhouse. Balked of their prey, the TTMs stormed, looted, and gutted the home of Lieutenant Benoît's brother. An elderly lawyer, Maître Benoît Armand, was killed because his first name was Benoît.

Belatedly learning that Benoît had been in asylum the whole time, but no less convinced of his guilt, the Garde Présidentielle then moved against the Dominican chancery on the Delmas road. Setting up machine guns to cover the building, where they mistakenly thought Benoît had taken refuge (together with twenty-two other fugitives, he was actually in the residence, not the chancery), they ransacked the premises and maltreated the lone woman secretary. This was the first occasion since 1915 that Haitians, this time uniformed soldiers, however, had violated a foreign diplomatic mission.

Their fury somewhat subsiding, the Duvalierists then invaded the grounds of the Dominican residence but were driven out by the chargé d'affaires, Francisco Bobadilla. In sullen rage they ringed the residence with troops and weapons while Benoît and his fellows inside wondered whether their fate might be that of Guillaume Sam.

Besides abhorrence throughout the hemisphere, the savagery in Port-au-Prince evoked two reactions: (1) the Caribbean Ready Amphibious Squadron of the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, complete with the 4th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, was ordered at forced draft to the Gulf of Gonâve;⁴⁶ (2) Juan Bosch put the Dominican Armed Forces on war footing, sent his navy to sea, massed 3000 troops at Dajabón, Elías Pinã, and Jimaní, sent Duvalier an ultimatum demanding withdrawal of troops surrounding the Port-au-Prince embassy, and invoked the Rio Treaty.

Duvalier never blinked. His response the same day, 28 April, was to break relations with Bosch while welcoming the Trujillos and their secret policemen to Port-au-Prince that afternoon on Pan Am flight 431A.

Even as the OAS council was voting to send an investigating team (the OAS ambassadors from Chile, El Salvador, Ecuador, Colombia, and Bolivia) to Port-au-Prince, Dr. Jacques Fourcand, the Macoute

46. Britain likewise ordered H.M.S. *Cavalier*, with a detachment of Royal Marines, to station in Gonâve Channel, where she was joined by a Canadian destroyer, H.M.C.S. *Saskatchewan*.

surgeon whose past manipulations of Red Cross aid had caused Haiti to be discredited by the International Red Cross, was preparing what in effect was Duvalier's Dessalinian answer.

With revolver at his hip, Fourcand, in a memorable Month of Gratitude oration, lashed out at "Haiti's great and powerful neighbor" as "a democracy of sluts," accused white Americans of raping Negro girls and loosing mad dogs against blacks in Alabama, and in his peroration warned the world what would happen if any foreigner tried to topple Duvalier:

Blood will flow in Haiti like a river. The land will burn from the north to the south, from the east to the west. There will be no sunrise and no sunset, just one great flame licking the sky. There will be a Himalaya of corpses, the dead will be buried under a mountain of ashes. It will be the greatest slaughter in history.

When Fourcand finished, Duvalier, who had been raptly listening, embraced him.

Seconding Fourcand, Luckner Cambronne called on all Duvalierists to keep their rifles and machetes ready. To set the stage further, after ignoring two telegrams from the OAS, Duvalier abruptly proclaimed out-of-season Carnival and, as police scraped up the decomposing corpses still surrounding the ruins of the Benoît home, began issuing *taffia* and orders that revelry be unconfined.

The morning the OAS commission reached Port-au-Prince, 30 April, the president had filled the city with *clairin*-soaked peasant mobs (photographs of the enormous sea of faces before the palace that day confirm Duvalier's claim that they numbered 150,000). While drums throbbed and *lambis* and *vaccines* hooted and crowds ululated, the president received the OAS representatives. Behind every ambassador stood a Macoute with cocked weapon.

For a quarter hour Duvalier sat silent and motionless, unblinking as Baron Samedi. Then he addressed them (Diederich and Burt in their *Papa Doc* say he cursed them "in foulest Créole"). When they replied in French, he answered only in Créole. Then, after herding the delegation onto a balcony from which they could see the seething masses packing the Places de l'Indépendance, Louverture, and Dessalines, the president spoke in furious Créole:

Listen carefully, people of Haiti: it is only once every forty years a man is discovered capable of embodying an ideal. Once every forty years. I am the personification of Haiti. Those who seek to destroy Duvalier seek to destroy our fatherland. I am, and I symbolize, a historic moment in your history. God and the people are the source of all power. Twice I have been given power; I have accepted it, and I shall keep it forever . . .

Now mixing his words, stuttering angrily sometimes in French, then back to Créole, Duvalier continued with mounting passion:

Bullets and machine guns capable of daunting Duvalier do not exist. They cannot touch me . . . Haitian people, lift up your hearts to the spirit of the Ancestors, prove that you are men, put marrow in your bones, let the blood of Dessalines flow in your veins . . .

Reaching climax, the dictator flung down his *défi*:

I take no orders or dictates from anyone, no matter where they come from. No foreigner shall tell me what to do. As President of Haiti, I am here only to continue the traditions of Toussaint Louverture and of Dessalines. *I am even now an immaterial being . . .*

Then, as the crowd roared and the sacred drums hammered, Duvalier related that, for the first time — inside his head, who knows? — he heard cries of "*Duvalier! Duvalier! Président-à-vie! Duvalier! Duvalier! Président pour toujours!*"⁴⁷

"*Moi,*" he replied. "*Moi, je suis prêt*" (I am ready).

After fifty-six hours of insult and affront more uncompromising even than Soulouque's defiance of Duquesne, the OAS council went away sorrowing. They knew that 103 persons had so far taken refuge from the terror in foreign embassies; estimates of hostages confined ran as high as 2000. As Graham Greene would report in the *New Republic*:

Travel on the island is almost at a standstill. The roads were always a deterrent, but now there are roadblocks around Port-au-Prince to the north and controls at every small town to the south. Within a circuit of a few kilometers from Port-au-Prince I was searched four times, and it took me four days at the police station to gain a two-day permit for the South . . .

Then, reflecting on what it was all about, Greene went on,

There have been many reigns of terror in the course of history. Sometimes they have been prompted by warped idealism like Robespierre's, sometimes they have been directed fanatically against a class or race by some twisted philosophy; surely never has terror had so bare and ignoble an object as here.

During these events, Bosch in Ciudad Santo Domingo had, in Ambassador Martin's words, "deliberately whipped up a war atmosphere," but American and OAS restraints (and apparently cold feet on the part of the Dominican military) were holding off the threatened invasion. With his usual spoiling diplomacy, Duvalier, knowing this would goad Washington, had meanwhile outflanked the OAS and taken his case out of the hemisphere to the U.N., where the Macoute Chal-

47. Dr. Duvalier's recollection of this day in his memoirs differs widely from our account. He concedes that he received the OAS team with "*hauteur*," but says that he delivered a scholarly, wide-ranging rationale of Haiti's position, lasting over an hour; whether in Créole or French he does not say.

mers delivered a racist appeal aimed at African votes, saying Haiti was defending the cause of black peoples everywhere.⁴⁸ That same day, 7 May, the State Department ordered evacuation of U.S. Government families from Haiti and urged private U.S. citizens to leave with them. When the OAS commission again asked Chalmers to guarantee the safety of the asylees shifted from the Dominican to the Colombian embassy, he answered them only in Créole, which was incomprehensible, but did allow twenty refugees to depart.

On 12 May, emerging from the Palais National for the first time in over two weeks, the president dedicated a new public building, the Bureau des Contributions on Rue des Casernes, where Maison Bellegarde had stood and seen so much history. But the engrossing question — was Duvalier preparing to leave the palace for good in three days? — remained unanswered.

The first rumors were that reservations had been booked with KLM for the 15th to fly a Duvalier party to Curaçao and thence to New York. This was amended on the 14th when the CIA confirmed, correctly, that Pan American had Duvalier reservations for space to Paris and thence, via Air France, to Algeria, where Ahmed Ben Bella was supposedly expecting them.

During the night of the 14th, in an atmosphere of anticipation and tension, Foggy Bottom issued its instructions: if Duvalier departed, he might well do so in the *Götterdämmerung* foretold by Fourcand; alternatively, he might unloose the *noirs* in another *Semaine Sanglante* and remain to preside. In either case, the Marines, who would remain close offshore, would go in to protect the U.S. and foreign communities and put a stop to violence (and Duvalier). The American embassy, coordinating with the Latin American ambassadors, would then bring into being a non-Duvalierist *gouvernement provisoire*, which the Washington planners visualized as being quickly reinforced by the more respectable among returning exile politicians. The OAS and even the U.N. would be asked to bless and support the resulting new regime. Meanwhile, every radio (including not a few aboard the naval flagship) was tuned to Port-au-Prince for news of Duvalier.

Everything in Washington's (and the American embassy's) calculus was sound except that it left out one major eventuality — that, to foreclose any pretext for international intervention, Duvalier might abruptly tune down the terror and stay put.

48. About this time, looking at the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Boxer* and Marine Expeditionary Brigade just offshore, Duvalier taunted, "If the OAS claims the right to intervene because of repressive internal conditions, why don't they land troops in Birmingham?"

While the American ambassador offered rum punches to twenty-two foreign reporters on the hilltop lawn of the American embassy residence with its Howard-Johnson white walls and orange roof, the naval amphibious task force took station the next morning under their eyes, and the world waited.

Radio-Commerce, usually so strident, played Tchaikowsky and Massenet interspersed with such soft and lilting favorites as "Choucouné." Gone were the bloodthirsty provocations, and so, mysteriously that morning, were the roadblocks. With every sensible Haitian indoors on this bright May day, Port-au-Prince seemed enveloped in a delicious spring calm punctuated only by the breeze rustling through the scarlet flame trees.

At two in the afternoon Duvalier held a press conference at the palace in the second-floor Salon Jaune, where diplomats were usually received. "Fresh pink roses," reported *Newsweek*, "had been placed on every table; on the chandeliers, the motif of the moment was cobwebs."

Smiling his inscrutable smile through Baron Samedi eyeglasses, the president of the republic nodded to his guests and delivered a brief statement: "Haiti will continue under my administration. The country is calm and peaceful . . ." Then he continued: he had no plans to leave — it was all "an Aesop's Fable" (the Haitian consulate general in New York was at that moment canceling Duvalier reservations for Paris and collecting a \$6000 refund); there was no crisis save that artificially manufactured by the U.S. Government; as Chief of the Revolution (a title he now assumed), he had merely taken necessary steps to resist subversion and prevent invasion; Haiti had no special relations with any communist country nor plans to declare itself a socialist state; as for the OAS, it had no power to intervene to prevent domestic turmoil . . . "If such a right did exist," Duvalier went on, "why has it not been invoked in Birmingham where there are not only possible threats of violence but actual violence? I sincerely sympathize with the President of the United States in what must be an extremely difficult situation for him."

Then, pleading press of business, François Duvalier inclined his head, again smiled slowly, and retired to his office in the next room.

Nonplussed reporters went down to the cable office to file their stories, the American ambassador's servants brought the chairs and empty glasses inside from the lawn, and Marines offshore took off their packs.

As the unconstitutional second term began, Venezuela and Costa Rica did sever relations (so did the *New York Times*, which editorialized, "Duvalier is sailing a pirate ship . . ."); the United States simply "suspended" relations and withdrew its ambassador (whom Duvalier

declared persona non grata and refused to allow back to pick up his household effects). On 3 June, sailing north in the wake of Admiral Gherardi while the State Department "reappraised" its position, the amphibious task force withdrew from the Gulf of Gonaïves.

Looking back on the whole fiasco (which in Washington's terms it was), John F. Kennedy ruefully asked Ambassador Martin, "Wouldn't it have been better if we'd let Bosch go?"

The few discordant notes in that superbly orchestrated performance of May 1963 came from the crack of rifle and pistol shots and the thud of bombs aimed by the one man Duvalier feared.

Clément Barbot had left his calling-card on 26 April. Now, early in May, with Rhéa, his cherished wife, and four children safe inside the Argentine embassy, he was ready to take the field.

In rapid succession, as only he could, Barbot harried and fooled Macoutes and Milice, shooting them down from ambush, killing them by tens at a time. Privy even to the mysteries of the telephone system, he got an open line to Duvalier's ornate white phone and warned the president that his coffee was poisoned (Duvalier's reply: "Clément, you will bring me your head . . ." Or was he thinking of his own father's head?). While Major Jean Tassy, his successor and one of the cruelest men in Haiti, relentlessly combed Pétionville, Barbot raided Fort Dimanche and emptied the armory. A closer call came when pursuers found his Martissant hideout not far from the bomb factory of 1957. But Barbot escaped — all they got was a weapons cache and a black dog who vanished in the night. Haitian suspicions were confirmed: Barbot could at will, as had been widely said, change himself into a black dog. Word went out from Duvalier: shoot black dogs on sight. Barbot's answer was to leave a personal note on Duvalier's own desk in the Palais.

On 21 May, as Duvalier herded in 50,000 *paysans* to celebrate the climax of the Month of Gratitude, Barbot's forces (now bearing the title "Comité des Forces Démocratiques Haïtiennes") bombed the Lycée Pétion and the Collège St. Pierre (the Episcopal boys' school), both co-opted to billet rural *miliciens*, and failed to blow up the HASCO fuel dump only because the grenades he used were high explosive, not thermite incendiary. During the night, while mysterious fires reddened the sky over the Cul-de-Sac, rifle fire of a predawn ambush and shoot-out echoed for hours from Déprez to Martissant.

Meanwhile, on the dark night of 19 May, a daring American reporter, the *Washington Star's* Jeremiah O'Leary, made contact with Barbot himself at a canefield sanctuary near Cazeau, south of Damien, where the new jet airport would eventually be built. Here for two hours

Barbot talked of his struggle, called Duvalier a "madman," said the president had expressly ordered that 300 persons a year be killed by TTMs, and asserted that Duvalier had accumulated more than \$1.5 million in a Swiss bank.

"Duvalier," said Barbot in his softspoken intense way, "is not a communist, a democrat, or anything else. He is an opportunist."

Then O'Leary was guided out through the drenching rain and back to Port-au-Prince.⁴⁹

On 14 July the end came. With ammunition running low, Barbot and his pediatrician brother, Dr. Harry Barbot, and several followers were betrayed by a peasant. Led by Gracia Jacques, the Garde Présidentielle and assorted *miliciens*, under Eloïs Maître and Luc Désir, ringed the Cazeau hideout and set the cane afire. When flames finally drove them out, the Barbots broke cover and were mowed down in blasts of automatic-weapons fire. Afterward, pictures of their riddled, mutilated corpses were triumphantly displayed throughout Port-au-Prince. But it was months to come before any black dog was safe.

The Barbot insurgency, mounted exclusively by *noirs authentiques* striking expertly at the vitals of the regime, imperiled Duvalier to a degree never previously or later attained by his enemies. Nonetheless, the sixteen months following the Barbots' deaths were punctuated by a succession of incursions and guerrilla infiltrations that managed to plunge Haiti into an abyss of violence and terror.⁵⁰

While all eyes focused on the capital, General Cantave, who had returned to the Dominican Republic, was, with some support from the local military, training and organizing a force, at one time 210 strong, for invasion of the North. The Cantave "invasion" materialized during August and September 1963 in a series of piecemeal and fruitless raids and probes, most of which had been betrayed in advance or otherwise compromised.

Ably supported (until a heart attack felled him in the field) by Colonel René Léon, who had fought the Castroites in the hills above Les Irois, Cantave successively took or tried to take Fort Liberté, Ouanaminthe,

49. Twelve years later, in April 1975, O'Leary wrote in the *Washington Star* that members of the Marine Mission, during its last days in Port-au-Prince, had supplied Barbot with small arms, ammunition, and grenades. This account was strongly denied, both privately and officially, by Colonel R. J. Batterton, chief of the mission from March to May 1963.

50. In a kind of reprise of the Barbot insurgency, a group of young Port-au-Princiens led by Hector Riobé, whose father and family Duvalier had killed, fought a three-day battle in caves behind Kenscoff, where they had secreted weapons. The Riobé stand, finally overrun by overwhelming FAd'H forces, inflicted some 100 casualties on government attackers on 18 July 1963. Riobé killed himself with his last round rather than be captured.