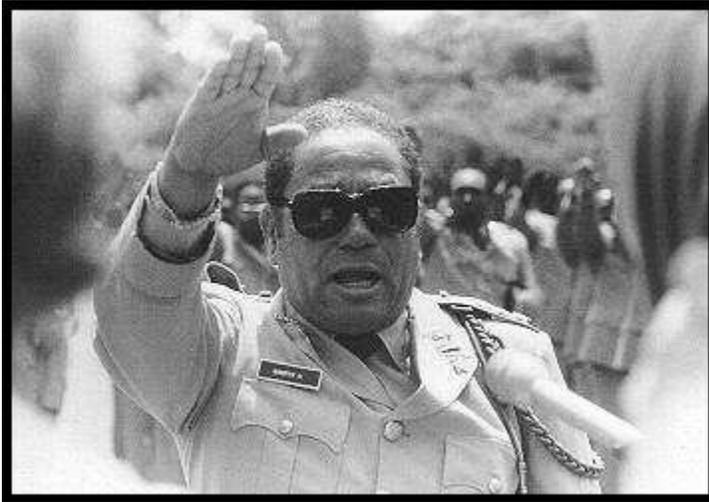


The Haitian Files



June 1988,
Lt. Gen. Henri Namphy
swearing allegiance to
the Constitution
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Cloutier

THE MAKING OF A COUP June 20th, 1988

by

Jean-Pierre Cloutier

Note : unpublished article. Following the military takeover, the publisher of The Haiti Times decided to cease publishing his newspaper.

(Port-au-Prince, June 22, 1988) Now that the little dust raised by the military coup has settled, that the military are firmly in power, and that few have openly expressed their formal opposition at the deposition of Leslie Manigat as the head man of the country, lips loosen and a more accurate account of events can be drawn.

From a variety of sources, official and anonymous, cross checked and to the best of our ability verified, here is a play by play description of the game played between the civilian government headed by Mr. Manigat and the military.

Tuesday, June 14. Lt-Gen. Henri Namphy, Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, summons Colonel Jean-Claude Paul, Commander of the Casernes

Dessalines battalion, and announces him of his transfer from the Casernes to the Army headquarters as service officer. Colonel Paul refuses his transfer, and returns to his post at the Casernes. Other officers were affected by promotions, transfers and retirements, including that of Colonel Morton Gousse to the rank of Brigadier General. From the Casernes Dessalines, Colonel Paul telephones President Manigat and expresses his wish to remain at his present post. Tension builds up in the surroundings of the Champ de Mars, where are strategically located the Presidential Palace, the Army Headquarters, and the Casernes Dessalines. **At 2 PM**, the streets are emptying fast. A group of government officials are meeting with foreign business persons at the Ministry of Finance, also located in the vicinity of the Champ de Mars. Finance Minister Turnier is called at the Palace and has to leave the near-ended meeting. However, other participants are asked not to leave the building, being told "something" has happened and the streets may not be safe. **At 4 PM**, they are allowed to leave. Tension persists and rumors escalate the affair.

Wednesday, June 15. The Office of the Presidency issues a communique early in the morning stating that the "transfers and retirement orders affecting high-ranking officers, which have been operated by the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces" have been decided without "the consent nor ratification of the Chief of State." Manigat orders the status quo until a "definitive" solution can be found, claiming article 143 of the Constitution which states that the President of the Republic is the nominal chief of the Armed Forces, but that he does not control them in person. It is now clear a major problem is developing and that it could degenerate into an open confrontation. A meeting is set between Manigat, Namphy, Williams Regala, former brigadier general and member of the National Council of Government where he occupied the post of Minister of Defense (a position confirmed under the Manigat-Celestin government). Foreign Affairs Minister Gerard Latortue, just back from Washington, is also present, so are other top officials. After four and a half hours, it seems a consensus has been reached. A communique signed by Colonel Gary Leon, Secretary General of the Armed Forces, states that the administrative measures announced on June 14 have been the object of "malevolent" speculations and interpretations and that following agreement between the President, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and the Minister of National Defense, they are "momentarily" delayed.

Thursday, June 16. During his regularly scheduled press conference, accompanied by his wife, Senator Myrlande Manigat, Social Affairs Minister Harry Carrenard, and Information Minister Roger Savain, Leslie Manigat is all smiles. Asked to comment on the apparent crisis brewing among the military,

he answers "the civilian power and the military institution have together given the country a lesson of patriotism and democracy... There was no confrontation, there was dialogue." This time, the storm seems over, but...

Friday, June 17. *Coup de théâtre.* Manigat orders the retirement of Lt-Gen. Namphy, and of Brigadier Generals Carl Michel Nicholas and Wilthan Lherisson. Former Colonel Morton Gousse is promoted Brigadier General, and named Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces. The reason invoked for the measure taken against Namphy and the two other "retirees" is "insubordination toward the constitutional chief of the Armed Forces." The communique is signed by Leslie Manigat and Prime Minister Martial Celestin, and appears to have been approved by the ministerial cabinet, to the exception of Williams Regala that threatens to resign within 48 hours if the orders are carried through.



Lt. Gen. Namphy, Gen. Williams "Bills" Regala in background, summer 1988. The nickname "Bills" was the one used by U.S. intelligence operatives posted in Haiti at the time.
Photo © Jean-Pierre Cloutier

Saturday, June 18. Lt-Gen. Henri Namphy is placed under house arrest at his home at Croix-des-Bouquets. The detachment insuring his protection is changed, his phone is cut-off. Namphy is reported depressed and fighting a liver ailment.

Sunday, June 19. The government-owned radio and television networks, RTNH, start announcing that under orders from President Manigat and Brigadier General Morton Gousse, close to 30 high-ranking officers seen by most as hardliners are either demoted from influential posts, or ordered into retirement. The Army Transmission Corps is busy relaying the message to all Departmental Commanders and all provincial garrisons, including the confirmation of Brigadier General Gousse as Commander-in-Chief, but concludes its message by saying "the instructions left by his predecessor are still valid until new order." A meeting between intermediate-level officers of the Presidential Guard takes place at the National Palace, as Namphy is still

under house arrest at his home, and as President Manigat and his wife get ready to entertain a group of friends and sympathisers. **12 Noon.** Two emissaries, corporals Milpic and Lamondry go to Namphy's house with the mission to convince him to return at the head of the Army, and the country. The Lt-Gen. is undecided, disquieted by the fact that there may be a trap underneath the proposal. The two soldiers return to the palace at 3:30 PM. **At 4 PM,** the soldiers at the Palace request from Colonel Roland Medor (Deputy Commander, 47th Company, Armored Division) the keys to the armored vehicles parked in the Palace's basement. Under-Lieutenant Etienne and Adjutant Thelfor are themselves requested to arm the five armored vehicles, and at **7 PM** two of them are sent en route to Namphy's house. The three others are on the Palace's lawn, one aimed at the Casernes Dessalines, the second at the Armed Forces headquarter building, the third at the nearby police station. **At 8 PM,** they arrive at Lt-Gen. Namphy's residence and meet little resistance from the guard detail which is more confused than unwilling. Namphy boards one armored vehicle with his wife and daughter, and the convoy sets for the Palace. In the meantime, another detachment is sent at the electricity company and at **8:40 PM,** a powercut is provoked while Namphy enters the Palace grounds. Heavy shooting is heard in the area, but not really as much as a result of confrontation as a clear message from those now in the palace. They want it clear they mean business, but no casualties are reported. The top brass of the Army is summoned at the Palace by Namphy and other officers. Brig-Gen. Lherisson is the first to arrive, followed shortly by Colonel Prosper Avril, and Majors Henri Robert Augustin, Gregoire Figaro and Henri Marc-Charles. Colonel Max Valles starts writing Namphy's first post-coup televised address. At 10 PM, President Manigat calls Colonel Paul over the phone and asks him to assure his security. A 50-man detachment is organized, but never leaves the Casernes. **11 PM.** General Namphy, from the Palace, calls Colonel Paul at the Casernes Dessalines and gives him an ultimatum. He asks him to join the ranks of the rest of the Armed Forces, or else. Colonel Paul asks for time, and consults with his troops.

Monday, June 20, 1:30 AM, Namphy goes on national television, and says he has deposed President Manigat, because he had engaged the country on the tracks toward dictatorship "under its most brutal form." "This is military government" he says, adding the country will now be run by laws and decrees. **3:30 AM,** two detachments headed by Colonel Christophe Dalompre and General Wilthan Lherisson are ordered to put President Manigat under arrest. They reach the Villa d'Accueil, Manigat's official residence, and sprinkle the building with heavy automatic weapon fire. The people inside the house are asked to come out with their hands up. Manigat, his wife and daughter are

taken to the military airport, while a group of about 15 others are put under arrest and taken to Fort Dimanche. Another call is placed by Namphy to Paul, and another ultimatum is given and orders are passed that if by 4 PM Colonel Paul is still undecided, the Casernes Dessalines will be attacked. Colonel Paul, **just before 4 PM**, agrees to go along with the coup, after having received a call from the Palace by Colonel Prosper Avril who tipped the balance at this point.



June 1988, Army
Chiefs of Staff
swearing allegiance to
the Constitution.
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By that time, the military had succeeded in presenting a unified front, in deposing Leslie Manigat, and in executing a surgically perfect bloodless coup.

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