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Missionaries stay inside
as U.S., Panama forces battle

By Mary E. Speidel

N-FMB

PANAMA CITY, Panama (BP)--Southern Baptist missionaries in Panama stayed in their homes Dec. 20 as U.S. troops battled Panamanian forces at Manuel Noriega's headquarters in Panama City and other locations.

"Everybody is in their place and safe at this point," said Joe Bruce, director of Southern Baptist work in Middle America. "They're taking seriously the information that they ought to stay in their homes."

Thirty-one Southern Baptist missionaries and five volunteers are assigned to Panama. Of that number, 15 missionaries and three volunteers are in Panama. The others are in the United States or in language school in Costa Rica.

U.S. forces attacked Noriega's headquarters early Dec. 20 after President Bush issued an order to "apprehend Manuel Noriega," protect American lives, restore democracy to Panama and ensure the Panama Canal treaty. Tensions in Panama had mounted for several days following the fatal shooting of an American military officer by Panamanian soldiers Dec. 16.

"The situation in Panama City is extremely tense at this point," said Southern Baptist missionary Mary Mangrum in a telephone interview Dec. 20. Mangrum, a religious education worker from Nashville, said the missionaries are exercising extreme caution and heeding news reports.

Mangrum said she woke up about 12:30 a.m. to the sounds of exploding bombs. Shooting, bombing and heavy air traffic continued until about 4:30 a.m., when things seemed to quiet down, she said. But Mangrum felt safe in her home in Balboa, an area near Noriega's Panama City headquarters. "It's just the safest place to be at this particular time," she said.

A Panamanian Baptist friend, Yadira de Rodriguez, spent the night at Mangrum's home following a religious education meeting Dec. 19. Rodriguez was not able to return home because of the fighting. "It has been comforting to me -- I'm single -- to have someone in the house." Mangrum said.

"We certainly have leaned heavily on prayer. It's been reassuring to know prayer chains have been started in the States."

Missionaries James and Dorothy Gilbert of Jackson, Miss., also live in Panama City, a few miles from the Marriott Hotel. U.S. Army Rangers reportedly were moving toward the Marriott, where American hostages were taken and later released.

"We're at home, and the area ... is real calm," Gilbert said, adding he and his wife had seen U.S. helicopters firing in areas near their neighborhood.

"Our neighbors have been very friendly, very supportive of us," Gilbert said. "We have had a number of our church people call in and assure us of their prayers, their concern. Some have offered to come and get us and take us to their homes. But we feel that it's better to leave things like they are right now."

"There's still firing going on where some military bases of the Panama Defense Forces" are located. Three Panamanian bases are near their home.

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But the main danger came from armed men loyal to Noriega seen roaming the streets, Gilbert said. Church members called the Gilberts to warn them that men had been seen going house to house looking for North Americans.

"That's the main risk," he said. "Last summer they did come into our neighborhood and checked on any North Americans, so they have made a list, but I have not seen them in the last few days."

In David, a city about 300 miles from Panama City, Southern Baptist missionary Glenn Nicholson said he had not seen any military activity or troop movements. "We're staying close to home and hoping to resume our day-to-day activities as soon as possible," said Nicholson, from Forrest City, Ark. His wife, Pauline, is from Cherry Valley, Ark.

Others in their neighborhood have remained at home, and schools in the area are closed, said Nicholson.

By early Dec. 20, nine U.S. soldiers had been killed, 39 wounded and one reported missing, according to reports. Panamanian officials reported at least 50 people had been killed and hundreds wounded. Missionaries have received no reports of casualties among Panamanian Baptists.

Eyewitnesses said Panama Defense Force bands still were on the streets of Panama City the morning of Dec. 20. Few U.S. troops had been seen on the ground since the heavy fighting of the night before.

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Donald D. Martin contributed to this story.

NOTE TO EDITORS: Southern Baptists have 29 missionaries assigned to Panama. Fifteen were on the field Dec. 19, when U.S. forces began operations against Gen. Manuel Noriega. Others were in language study or in the United States. One volunteer from Texas is in Panama. Some names on the list below are repeated when missionaries are related to more than one state.

In Panama at this time are:

- Arizona. Allison Holman, a former Winslow and Sells pastor.
- Arkansas. Glenn and Pauline Vaughn Nicholson; he is native of Forrest City and former Smithville pastor; she is from Cherry Valley.
- Kentucky. Daniel Hatfield of Louisville, former adjunct professor at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.
- Louisiana. Howard Hooper of Alexandria.
- Mississippi. James and Dorothy Smith Gilbert of Jackson.
- Missouri. Mary Mangrum, former Independence minister of child education.
- North Carolina. Menda Sue Godfrey (Mrs. Daniel) Hatfield of Charlotte. Larry and Charlot Fox McCoy of Statesville; he is a former Mount Airy pastor.
- New York. Marvina (Mrs. Howard) Hooper of Bronx.
- Ohio. Sharon Lohrenz (Mrs. Richard) Cook of Findlay.
- Oklahoma. Richard Cook of Tulsa. Allison and Gail Matlock Holman of Gotebo and Bartlesville. Edward and Kathryn Randquist Steele of Moore and Carnegie.
- Texas. Richard Cook, former Odessa pastor. Keith Morris, a two-year volunteer media worker and Waco native. Edward Steele, a former minister of music in Sherman.

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In language school or in the United States are:

- Arkansas. John Bayer II and Brenda Wynn Bayer of Clinton, language study in Costa Rica; he is a former Clinton businessman.
- District of Columbia. Robert Myers, D.C. native, on furlough in Florida.
- Florida. Annette Montgomery Wheeler of Alachua and Vero Beach, on vacation in Florida.
- Georgia. Laurence and Bertha Lines of Marietta, two-year volunteers, in Georgia since May; he is a career U.S. Air Force veteran who also worked with a trucking firm in Atlanta. Wayne Wheeler of Macon, mission chairman, and his wife, Annette, of Griffin, on vacation in Florida; he is a former associate pastor in Cuthbert, pastor in Ashburn and McDonough, and taught high school in Macon.
- Missouri. Bradley and Jean Crews Bean of St. Louis.
- North Carolina. Jackie Cooper, former Long Beach pastor, on furlough in South Carolina. Wayne Wheeler, mission chairman, and his wife, Annette, on vacation in Florida; he was minister of music and promotion at North Rocky Mount and choir director in Wake Forest; she was a schoolteacher in Garland. Robert and Betty Jo Carroll Hensley of Asheville and Greenville. He is a former director of missions for Robeson Baptist Association in Lumberton; she is a former teacher in several North Carolina school districts.
- Oklahoma. Mark Fuller of Okmulgee, appointed in October 1988, to begin missionary orientation in January 1990.
- South Carolina. Jackie and Arlene Harrison Cooper of Greenville, on furlough in South Carolina.
- Texas. Bradley Bean, former Stephenville pastor, on medical furlough in Texas. Mark and Mary Fuller, appointed in October 1989, to begin missionary orientation in January 1990; he was a sales manager in Arlington; she is from Clarendon. Robert Myers, former Christian recreation director in Dallas, on furlough in Texas. Jack and Ganelle Newman Pearce of Brownfield, on vacation in Texas; he is former pastor of churches in Perryton, Brownfield, Lorenzo and Dalhart.
- Virginia. Jeane Christie (Mrs. Robert) Myers of Arlington, on furlough in Florida.

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Churches adapt, minister
in changing communities

By Ken Camp

F-Texas

Baptist Press
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DALLAS (BP)--When the ethnic make-up of their neighborhoods began changing, two Dallas churches could have fled to the suburbs or ignored the people around them and watched their congregations die.

Instead, North Temple Baptist Church and Hampton Place Baptist Church made commitments to minister to their increasingly Hispanic communities.

Wylie Heath became bivocational pastor at North Temple about two and one-half years ago, realizing the time probably would come when the Anglo church and its Hispanic mission would need to unify. He knew the combined congregation would need a bilingual, bicultural pastor and he would need to step aside. But leading the congregation through that crucial transition time was not easy.

"I talked to Berl Cavin at Dallas Baptist Association when the church was without a pastor, and he was the one who ultimately recommended me to the church," Heath said.

"Berl told me that it probably ought to be one of my objectives at the church to lead the Anglos to move toward this. I had it in mind from the beginning, but I did not know how long it would take."

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About five years ago, North Temple began a Hispanic department and called Pedro Aviles, a native of Puerto Rico, as part-time mission pastor. But starting a separate ministry for the Hispanics was one thing; encouraging them to assume leadership and become the majority in the church was another.

"It was hard for them (the Anglos). In the last 10 to 12 years, they had seen their neighbors move away. As low-income Hispanics moved in, sometimes with two or three families having to share one house, community property values went down. That created some resentment, some bitterness toward the Hispanic community," Heath said.

"But when people love the Lord and love the church, they will do what they must to see the work survive."

Heath tried to prepare the congregation for the change through his preaching, emphasizing God's love for all people, and through the church's benevolence ministry. Beginning a neighborhood food pantry and making the church facilities available to public health officials for a free weekly clinic, the members of North Temple began to catch a vision of ministering in their community.

When Aviles graduated from Dallas Baptist University and left the Spanish-speaking mission of North Temple, Heath decided the time was right for a change. He offered his resignation to the church, suggesting that they combine his part-time salary with that of the mission pastor to create one full-time position for a bilingual minister.

"I realize not every pastor in a similar situation could do that," he said. "I'm a pilot with Atlantic Southeast Airlines, the Delta connection out of D-FW Airport, and a golf pro at Sleepy Hollow Country Club. Since I was bivocational and had other sources of income, I was able to step aside when the church called the new pastor."

Three months ago, North Temple called Albert Reyes as pastor. Currently, the church holds separate English-speaking and Spanish-speaking services on Sunday and a combined bilingual service on Wednesday evening.

"I think the church made a strong statement to the community when they called a Hispanic as pastor," Reyes said. "They didn't know what they were getting when they called me. They took a big risk."

"The transition should have been made years ago," said Louise Tidwell, a longtime member of North Temple. "We rejected the idea at first. We fought it. But when we saw it wasn't working our membership made the adjustment. I'm really proud of our people."

"Change isn't easy, but nothing hurts more than seeing what you've worked so hard for dwindling away."

Reyes said his goal is to be inclusive and become pastor to all of his congregation, both English-speaking and Spanish-speaking.

"I want us to continue to work toward unity -- to feel that we are one church rather than two," he said.

To enhance that feeling of unity, the two language groups now are meeting together for quarterly Sunday evening observances of the Lord's Supper.

"It's a chance for some of the English-speaking people to get to know Spanish-speaking people and to see that, yes, there are differences," said Reyes, "but we have a greater oneness as brothers and sisters in Christ."

Hampton Place Baptist Church is following a similar, though not identical, path. Like North Temple, Hampton Place saw its surrounding community becoming increasingly Hispanic, while the median age of its Anglo membership continued to rise.

"We want to be a neighborhood church ministering to the whole community," said Pastor Maurice Martin.

Contacting Richard Faling, coordinator of church ministries for the Baptist General Convention of Texas, Hampton Place entered into Project: Assistance for Churches in Transitional communities. As a result of the PACT study, the church began making adjustments. The first was creation of a full-time position for a Hispanic, bilingual, bi-cultural associate pastor. About one year ago, Hampton Place called Mateo Rendon.

"I believe our church is doing what needs to be done. Coming into a situation like this is exciting, challenging, and -- at the same time -- rewarding," Rendon said.

Unlike some churches, Hampton Place has been reluctant to place Spanish-speaking people in a separate mission or department, preferring to bring them into the total life of the church. This has been both a blessing and a barrier to ministry, according to Rendon.

"Many Hispanic people have the mindset that the big church is where the Anglo goes. When we bring them to church, they ask: 'Where's the Hispanic mission? Where's the Hispanic department?'"

"It's mind-blowing for them to realize that I'm associate pastor to the whole church.

"On the other hand, the Anglo mindset is often to have Hispanics in a little mission off to the side. We keep having to say: 'We don't have a mission. We don't have a department. We have a church.'"

In the near future, the church hopes to install headsets in the auditorium to provide Spanish translation for non-English-speaking Hispanics.

Hampton Place also plans to begin Casa de Amigos. The "House of Friends" will include tutoring programs for "at risk" fifth graders and sixth graders in local schools, literacy programs and sewing classes.

The PACT committee is continuing to study the needs of the church and community, and members of the committee meet regularly with the church leadership. PACT is made possible in Texas through gifts to the Mary Hill Davis Offering for State Missions.

"My goal this first year has been to get to know the people and let them get to know me," said Rendon. "Five years from now, we hope that a good percentage of the congregation will be Hispanic and that we will begin to see Hispanic deacons and other leaders."

In 10 years, depending on the transition of the community itself, Rendon hopes Hampton Place could have a 75 percent Hispanic membership. One of his more immediate goals is less ambitious.

"I've just been trying to get people not to introduce me as their Hispanic pastor," he said. "They don't need to say I'm Hispanic. That's obvious. Slowly, people are beginning to see me as the associate pastor of all the church."