

## **Revolt In Haiti: Summary Of Events & Statements, April 6-10, Part 1**

*by John Neagle*

*Category/Department: General*

*Published: Tuesday, April 11, 1989*

[See Chronicle 4/04/89 and 04/06/89 for accounts of previous developments surrounding the April 2 attempted coup, and subsequent revolt of soldiers pertaining to the Dessalines Barracks.] April 6: Members of the Leopards commando unit and troops from the Dessalines Barracks joined forces in a mutiny against the government of Lt.Gen. Prosper Avril. The number of soldiers in the two military units supporting the rebellion was unclear. [Dessalines troops number 750, and the Leopards, 400.] They accused the government of favoritism toward the Presidential Guard in pay and living conditions, and of arbitrarily dismissing senior officers in a crackdown on drugs and corruption. An unidentified witness told AP that an armored car carrying loyalist soldiers of the Presidential Guard on Thursday night chased a stolen army truck carrying members of the Leopards unit that shot in the air as they drove up and down on a road. The rebels fled into a house and the loyalist troops destroyed it with high-caliber machine gun- fire, killing the four and wounding one, said the witness. An unidentified diplomat confirmed two of the deaths for AP. A US Embassy statement offered support for the Haitian government. It said, "The United States is reassured by democratization under Avril." Cables were cut by government troops at Radios Antilles, Inter, Metropole, and Liberte, apparently for violating military censorship imposed by the state of emergency. [The censorship order came after the Dessalines soldiers went on the air at independent radio Metropole to demand that Avril resign.] Next, a grenade thrown Thursday night by rebel troops knocked out the transmitter tower at the state television station, according to news director Annaise Chavanet. Unidentified diplomatic sources told AP (on April 7) that loyalist officers, including interim army chief Maj. Gen. Gerard Abraham, went to Dessalines Barracks Thursday afternoon to speak to the rebels and returned with an understanding that a reconciliation agreement was reached. But the rebels reneged on the deal, said the sources. According to radio reports, rebels seized buildings, including the telecommunications company, the state central bank, the Ministry of Education and the State Bureau of Statistics. In front of the Dessalines Barracks, 300 supporters blocked streets with barricades. April 7: Fighting continued. Rebels seized control of a Roman Catholic station, Radio Soleil, and broadcast a statement accusing Avril of "war crimes." An unidentified soldier said they had seized the station to deny a broadcast statement by Avril that the rebels had decided to end their dispute. He said, "That's a lie. We are holding our ground." The soldier said the Dessalines troops and colleagues from the Leopards unit "ask one thing: that Gen. Avril leave." Youths supporting the rebels built barricades of burning tires along a five-mile stretch of Delmas Avenue, a main avenue in the capital. Witnesses said rebels rode through the capital in jeeps, pickup trucks and motorbikes, shooting in the air and warning people to go home. Rebel soldiers were positioned 200 yards from the Presidential Palace, which was guarded by loyal troops, anti-aircraft guns and cannons. Under a state of emergency, stores, schools and offices were closed. Airlines canceled flights into Haiti's international airport. On Friday evening, explosions rocked the plaza in front of the National Palace. Loyalist troops from the Presidential Guard fired cannons from armored cars and howitzers in the plaza and the area of the palace in an apparent move against the mutinous soldiers in the Dessalines Barracks. The action began at 7:40 p.m. Within

20 minutes, more than a dozen cannon shots, accompanied by steady machine gun fire, was heard coming from the plaza and the direction of the barracks. Unidentified sources told DPA that the Haitian Coast Guard, which serves as the country's navy and marine corps, had joined the rebellious soldiers in demanding that Avril step down. April 8: Intermittent fighting between loyalist troops and rebels close to the Presidential Palace continued. According to government sources, loyalist soldiers occupied two-thirds of the Dessalines Barracks. Shooting also began in the Delmas and Petionville suburbs of the capital in what was believed to be a confrontation between loyal palace guard soldiers and the Leopard corps headquartered in Petionville. According to DPA, there were rumours of two US ships docking in the Port-au-Prince harbor. Unidentified sources in the capital told DPA that the US had shipped arms to Avril's forces. Unidentified diplomatic sources told AP that the loyalists appeared to gain the upper hand Friday night when they shelled the Dessalines Barracks near the palace and flushed the mutinous soldiers out. Fierce fighting broke out again early Saturday when an undetermined number of rebels seized control of the Roman Catholic seminary less than a mile away from the Dessalines Barracks and launched mortar shells in the vicinity of the palace. There were no reports of damage to the palace. The seminary complex includes an elementary school and the Catholic station Radio Soleil. Small-arms fire mingled with the boom of heavy artillery. Soldiers of the Presidential Guard were seen racing across the Champ-de-Mars Plaza in front the palace, firing in the direction of the Dessalines Barracks. An unidentified source close to the Haitian government told AP that 17 soldiers, all thought to be rebels, died in the attack on the barracks. The state hospital said at least one civilian was killed, and unconfirmed reports said the civilian death toll was at least three. A government communique called on the Haitian Red Cross for urgent medical assistance and exhorted the rebels to surrender. Red Cross ambulances raced through the capital's streets. News reports said members of the elite Leopards commando unit who had joined the mutiny were seen removing their uniforms. Witnesses said they abandoned their base in the city's suburbs after giving up without a fight. There were no reports of fighting elsewhere in Haiti. (cont.)

-- End --