

A Skillful Show of Strength

U.S. Marines in
the Caribbean,
1991-1996

U.S. Marines in Humanitarian Operations

COVER: *Cpl B. J. Bell, 2d Battalion, 2d Marines, stands guard near civilian Haitians between the town of Cap-Haïtien and the air field during Operation Uphold Democracy. The American flag in the background was raised by local residents as a welcome to the liberating troops.*

DVIC DM-SD-95-01869

A Skillful Show of Strength:
U.S. Marines in the Caribbean, 1991-1996

U.S. Marines in Humanitarian Operations



by
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Washington, D.C.
2003

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PCN 190 0041 0600

Foreword

What Marines did in the Caribbean between 1991 and 1996 was both new and old. It was new because humanitarian operations were different from combat in Vietnam or Southwest Asia. It was also new for many because it was “joint,” Marines were integrated into joint task forces, especially when they were called on to care for Haitian and Cuban migrants at Guantanamo Bay.

But it was also old and familiar. Generations of Marines have deployed to the Caribbean in one role or another. Although they would not have recognized the words, Marines in Haiti, Dominican Republic, or Panama knew the notions of “military operations other than war” and “low intensity conflict” earlier in the 20th century. It is no accident some of the Marines who went to the Caribbean in the 1990s took with them a copy of *The Small Wars Manual*, a Marine Corps classic about unusual challenges on foreign shores written between the two world wars by writers with fresh memories of earlier operations in many of the same places.

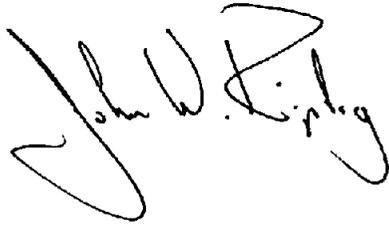
If there was one lesson in the Caribbean, it was that traditional Marine Corps virtues—initiative, discipline, and flexibility—were still as useful and applicable in the final years of the last century as they had always been. Humanitarian operations did not lack intensity. The challenges some of the Marines in this story faced were not combat, but on some days they came close, as thin green lines of Marines confronted crowds of angry and violent migrants at Guantanamo and in Panama. When the Marines of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force occupied the northern provinces of Haiti in September 1994, they entered an unusual environment that, at least at first, was not war and not peace. They had to deal with large and usually friendly crowds, as well as a hostile police force and military that disappeared from the scene only after a brief but intense firefight that left a number of Haitian policemen dead. If there are any overall lessons, they are that the same Marine rifleman has to be ready for combat and military operations other than war, and that it is the leaders of small units, squads, and platoons who often determine the outcome in ambiguous situations.

The author, Colonel Nicholas E. Reynolds, USMCR, began collecting material about migrant operations in the Caribbean in 1992. He was able to draw on the work of others, such as the History and Museums Division’s oral historian, Richard A. Long, who conducted a lengthy interview with the Marine commander of Joint Task Force Guantanamo Bay, and to make good use of materials collected by his counterparts at the Naval Historical Center, Captains Alexander G. Monroe and William R. McClintock, USNR, who had the good fortune to spend time at Guantanamo during the operation. Colonel Reynolds then conducted his own interviews of participants and collected additional raw material from various archives.

When it became clear in 1994 there would be a sequel to the operation at Guantanamo, the migrant operations known as Sea Signal and Safe Haven, Colonel Reynolds repeated the process, interviewing participants, collecting documents, and making the trip to Guantanamo himself, where he was able to “walk the ground.”

The story of the Haitian migrants could not be told without telling the related story of the invasion and occupation of Haiti in September 1994, when Marines went ashore at Cap-Haïtien in the northern part of that country. To cover that story, Headquarters Marine Corps dispatched an officer on active duty, Major John T. Quinn II, to join the special purpose task force for a few weeks. Major Quinn did yeoman’s work conducting interviews, taking photographs and generally recording events, either on paper or on tape. He demonstrated anew that the best way to preserve Marine Corps history is to have a full-time historian on the ground during the operation that is able to focus on recording events as they occur.

Colonel Reynolds is currently serving as the officer in charge of the History and Museums Division's Individual Mobilization Detachment. His training in history was at Oxford University, where he wrote a doctoral dissertation about the German army before serving as an infantry officer in the Marine Corps. Following active duty with 3d Battalion, 2d Marines, he held a variety of reserve billets, including that of company commander at The Basic School during the Persian Gulf War. He is also the author of another historical center publication, *Marine Operations in Panama: 1988-1990*, and he edits the *Journal of America's Military Past* for the non-profit Council on America's Military Past.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "John W. Ripley". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "R".

John W. Ripley
Colonel, U.S. Marine Corps (Retired)
Director of Marine Corps History and Museums

Preface

When the Chief Historian of the Marine Corps, Benis M. Frank, asked me to work on Operation Guantanamo Bay in 1992, I reacted like many Marines when they are told they are no longer primarily riflemen: Wasn't there a combat history that needed doing? But, like a good Marine, I did what I was told, and as time went on, I grew to like the assignment. That is, I gained an appreciation for the challenges of migrant operations. Being a Marine has never been just about combat, and yes, real Marines do "military operations other than war." A close reading of Marine Corps history tells us they always have. The story of Marine operations in the Caribbean from 1991 to 1996 is an interesting one, worth telling and from which future Marine commanders can learn.

It is a story I could not have told without the help of a number of people, many of them participants in the story. Two commanding generals of the humanitarian joint task forces, Brigadier General George H. Walls, Jr., and General Michael J. Williams, made themselves available for interviews and were willing to share personal papers with me. The same was particularly true of two other officers who served with General Williams: Colonel John R. Allen and Major Franz J. Gayl. They did what good historians do: they saved records and wrote about what happened while it was still fresh in their minds. Their con-

When the Marines landed in Haiti in 1915 to restore order, the British diplomat R. M. Kohan cabled a concise summary of the operation to London:

The landing party put on shore at Port-au-Prince on the 28th of July was not strong.... A skillful show of strength was, however, made and by at once seizing all points of military importance, together with practically all government arms and ammunition and disarming all Haitian military and civilians, the landing force was able to anticipate any serious resistance which might have been offered.

—Quoted in Robert Debs Heintz, Jr., and Nancy Gordon Heintz, *Written in Blood, The Story of the Haitian People 1492-1975* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978)

tributions gave life to what might otherwise have been a dry recitation of facts. I would also like to thank the other Marines, too numerous to mention by name, who made themselves available for interviews. Major John T. Quinn II, who was sent to Haiti by the History and Museums Division in September 1994, would no doubt voice his appreciation for the officers of Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force Caribbean who supported him, especially the commander, Colonel Thomas S. Jones, and his operations officer, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Greenwood.

I was able to rely on the support and advice of many members of the History and Museums Division and wish to express my thanks to them all. The former Director, Brigadier General Edwin H. Simmons, was kind enough to provide guidance in the early stages of the project, as was former Chief Historian Benis M. Frank. Their support and encouragement over the years has meant a lot to me. My colleagues Colonel Dennis J. Mroczkowski, USMCR, and Dr. Jack Shulimson read early drafts and gave me the feedback I needed. I am grateful to members of other sections of the Division who provided useful assistance: Danny J. Crawford, head of the Reference Section, and his staff; Frederick J. Graboske, head of

Part I

Marines in Refugee Operations, 1991-1996



Chapter 1

Operation GTMO

Setting the Scene

During the Spanish-American War of 1898, Sergeant John H. Quick earned the Medal of Honor when he scaled a rock in southeastern Cuba while under heavy fire and began directing naval gunfire from the distant USS *Dolphin* toward enemy positions. In an ensuing dispatch entitled "The Red Badge of Courage Was His Wig-Wag Flag," novelist and part-time war correspondent Stephen Crane captured the moment for posterity, describing Sergeant Quick as the "spruce young sergeant of Marines, erect, his back to the showering bullets [was] solemnly and intently wigwagging." The Marines went on to take the high ground near the large natural harbor known as Guantanamo Bay, which the U.S. Navy wanted for a coaling station. This became the prologue for the modern history of the Marine Corps in the Caribbean.

In the first part of the 20th Century, the United States held sway over the Caribbean, largely because of the strategic importance it attached to the Panama Canal, which was completed in 1911. The U.S. generally resisted any threats to the stability of the region.

Guantanamo Bay was leased in perpetuity from Cuba in 1903 for the Navy, and the harbor became one of the pivots of U.S. power in the Caribbean. Playing a traditional role for the Navy, Marines guarded Guantanamo for the rest of the century.

In 1915, when Haiti disintegrated into anarchy in the wake of yet another revolution, the senior officer present afloat, Admiral William B. Caperton, sent a message to nearby Guantanamo requesting a contingent of Marines to restore order. Within days, the first of what was to become a long column of Marines landed on





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American sailors and Coast Guardsmen approach a 30-foot, single-masted sailboat in a motor launch from the USS Whidbey Island (LSD 41) in July 1988. The 92 Haitian migrants were taken on board and later transferred to a Coast Guard cutter. In accordance with a standing agreement between the United States and Haiti, the migrants were returned to their homeland.

Haiti's shores with the concurrence of the British and French governments. For the roughly 2,000 Marines of that first contingent, restoring order was a matter of protecting the customs service and keeping the cacos, or bandit mafias, under control.

Under the provisions of a treaty ratified in late 1915, the U.S. Government would organize a Haitian police force. Marine and naval officers, including such famous Marines as then-Major Smedley D. Butler, were seconded to the paramilitary *Gendarmerie* to occupy the senior posts. Backing them up were Marine noncommissioned officers and Navy corpsmen. Marines served in that capacity for nearly 20 turbulent years.

Throughout the 1900s, Marines were committed to operations on either side of Haiti. Prominent among them were interventions in the Dominican Republic in 1904, then from 1914 to 1924, and finally, in 1965. When Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba, the notion of fighting communism so near U.S. soil added another dimension to operations in the Caribbean, and the base at Guantanamo became an important iconic outpost of freedom. It also proved useful to the mod-

ern Navy as a deepwater training facility. The Marine garrison on the base swelled to regimental proportions during the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, but generally the contingent of Marines stationed there was much smaller. In the early 1990s, Marines numbered roughly 450, mostly committed to security and patrolling operations around the perimeter of the base. The Cubans watched the Marines and the Marines watched the Cubans along the heavily mined fence line separating them.

Jack Nicholson, who played the overzealous barracks commander in, "A Few Good Men," a film about Marines at Guantanamo, explained this mission in vivid terms. Although the film was heavily fictionalized, there were a few grains of truth in Nicholson's memorable words, especially his in-your-face remark that every morning he ate breakfast "300 yards from 4,000 Cubans" who were trained to kill him. For the Marines who spent weeks and months on the line, either in watchtowers or on patrol in the scrub brush along the "cactus curtain," it was not an exercise but a deadly serious form of duty. Occasionally, Marines would rescue a refugee from the mine-

field or help one through the wire, and there was occasional gunfire, especially if the Cubans started shooting at an escaping refugee. Marines were authorized to return fire only in self-defense under strictly enforced rules of engagement.¹

In 1991, many of these historical themes played out again. In February, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, a former Catholic priest and charismatic preacher, took office as the first democratically elected president of Haiti. By September of that same year, the Haitian military was fed up with his rule and easily overthrew Aristide despite his enormous popularity with the masses. Aristide fled the country and began a high profile, extremely vocal campaign against the military regime of Brigadier General Raoul Cedras. The ousted leader eventually made his way to the United States where he lobbied for action against the regime. The U.S. Government reacted by declaring an economic embargo of Haiti, but the move was more to express support of a democratic Haiti than for Aristide. Unfortunately, the embargo resulted in the downward spiral of the already abysmally low

standard of living of most Haitians. The embargo left the tiny ruling class, which always seemed able to assure its own comfort, virtually unaffected.

From the day the coup occurred, there were general fears the country would return to a state of anarchy, which might threaten the lives of the estimated 7,000 U.S. citizens living in the island nation. The new military government fueled those fears through its enforcement of familiar methods of repression such as allowing police and soldiers a free hand to beat real or imagined opponents, often in front of news cameras. The Joint Chiefs of Staff reacted by asking Admiral Leon A. Edney, Commander in Chief, Atlantic (CinCLant), Norfolk, Virginia, to develop a contingency plan for the evacuation of American citizens. By 1 October 1999, approximately 350 Marines had departed Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, for Guantanamo to support the plan. This first contingent of Marines was on stand-by to deploy to Haiti as the forward element of Joint Task Force (JTF) 129, the name for which was eventually



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Haitian migrants board a U.S. Coast Guard boat. Thousands of Haitians were intercepted and taken on board Navy and Coast Guard ships between October and December 1991. They were then transported to Naval Station, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, for temporary housing while their legal status was determined.

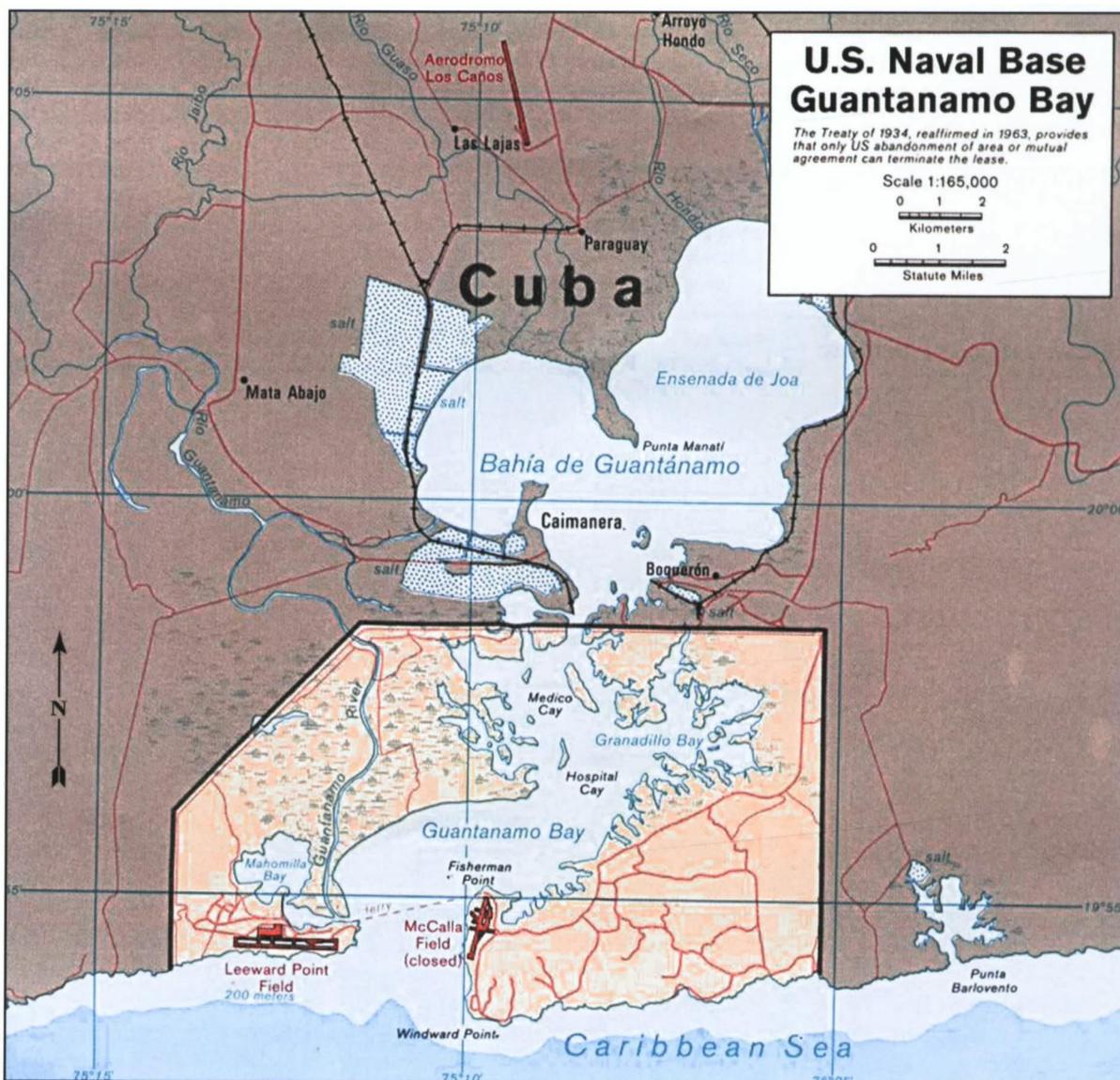
changed to JTF GTMO, a somewhat awkward contraction of Guantanamo. Brigadier General Russell H. Sutton was assigned as commander of the group and he drew his headquarters from the command element of II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF).²

Throughout much of the coming year, Marines would remain on stand-by for a non-combatant evacuation operation of American citizens in Haiti. Many of those Marines spent much of that time living in the barracks at Guantanamo Bay. The force did not deploy further. By late November the situation in Haiti appeared to have settled and the Marines returned to the continental United States.³

There also was some contingency planning for Joint Task Force 140, the mission of which might be to occupy Haiti.⁴ But instead of launching

operations against the island of Haiti, Marines became involved with Haitians in a way that few had foreseen. Within a month of the coup, hundreds of Haitians took to the sea in open boats, most with the general intention of sailing to the United States in search of a better life away from economic hardship. This exodus was risky since few of the boats were seaworthy and most were desperately overloaded. One 30-foot fishing boat, which the U.S. Coast Guard came across as it was floundering, held some 240 people, including women and children. Many of the craft could hardly be called boats; more closely resembled the fabled makeshift raft Huck Finn used to float down the Mississippi.

In late October, the Coast Guard, which routinely patrolled the waters in the Windward Passage between Haiti and Cuba, rescued the first





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Laundry lines and cots for use by Haitian migrants fill the well deck of the landing ship USS Pensacola (LSD 38) while docked at Guantanamo Bay. The Pensacola served as temporary housing while tent camps were being erected on land in late November and early December 1991.

19 Haitians. Perhaps because the word somehow made it back to Haiti that Americans were picking up migrants in boats, the floodgates opened wide and the Coast Guard was soon rescuing ever-increasing numbers of migrants at sea. Messages from that period suggest most of the Coast Guard and Navy commanders dealing with the growing migrant problem believed the only practical interim solution was to take them to Guantanamo. By 10 November, nearly 500 migrants were on two Coast Guard cutters at anchor in the harbor at Guantanamo. Unfortunately, a cutter is a fairly small ship, more like a large motor yacht than a small warship, and the degree of overcrowding—and subsequent unsanitary conditions—was staggering. A few hundred yards away, those on shore could see just how bad conditions were becoming.

The U.S. Government was now faced with deciding where, and under what conditions, the migrants should be off-loaded. The Coast Guard had previously been able to simply return migrants to Haiti under a bilateral arrangement known as the Alien Migrants Interdiction

Agreement (AMIA). However, a court challenge to the AMIA changed that and prohibited the U.S. Government from returning migrants to Haiti without at least reviewing their status in some way. Guantanamo was nearby and had the advantage of providing a secure holding area without being in the territorial United States.⁵

But this stopgap measure only made the situation more critical as time passed and the number of persons grew. The migrants continued to live under field expedient shelters on the decks of the cutters where heat, dirt, and boredom compounded each other. Various echelons of command debated the problem for nearly two weeks. Finally, the Guantanamo base commander, Captain William C. McCamy, USN, decided conditions on the cutters had become unmanageable and ordered the base to prepare to house the refugees ashore. On 22 November, after receiving authority from Washington, Admiral Edney authorized Captain McCamy to provide “emergency humanitarian assistance” for up to 483 migrants. It was a cautious approval. Although the message mentioned preparations to deploy a joint



Photo courtesy of BGen George H. Walls, Jr. *BGen George H. Walls, Jr., commanded Joint Task Force GTMO. He stands on the hill overlooking Camp McCalla, the temporary home to thousands of Haitian migrants. Guantanamo Bay is visible in the background, as is the leeward side of the base.*

task force to Guantanamo Bay to care for the migrants, it went on to stipulate it did not “authorize the erection of any new structures for refugees aboard GTMO, including tents.”⁶

For the Marines at the barracks, it was like waking up the morning after the Marine Corps Ball to find the migrants at their doorstep. They saw the cutters in the bay swinging at anchor and waiting for a decision. When the command in Norfolk permitted them to land, the Haitians first met the Marines, who were working alongside the Navy to prepare for their largely unexpected arrival. The Marines’ principle focus was on the facilities at Camp Bulkeley, an expeditionary training camp in the southeast corner of the base named after famed torpedo boat commander, Lieutenant John Bulkeley, who had spirited General Douglas MacArthur from the Philippines in 1942 and gone on to command the base at Guantanamo later in his career.

Camp Bulkeley was largely down to its bare-bones when the work began. There were a few simple whitewashed buildings nestled in the hills overlooking the sea, some basic plumbing, and concrete slabs designed for tents. Each slab could accommodate one general-purpose tent housing

18 to 20 cots, which left virtually no room for privacy. One news story about the camp described it as “windswept,” which only vaguely conveyed the small, barren stretch of ground perched on a cliff overlooking the Caribbean.⁷

A functional system evolved over time where the Navy ran the camp inside while the Marines provided security outside the perimeter.⁸ The operation ran smoothly, in no small part because of an October naval base defensive exercise conducted to test base readiness for handling and processing large numbers of Cuban refugees—the kind of refugees the U.S. Government had been expecting for years.⁹

Meanwhile, the command echelon at Norfolk, recognizing the small force of Marines and sailors at Guantanamo could not care for large numbers of migrants for an extended period, were looking ahead at the possibility of deploying a joint task force to care for the migrants. The Marines of the 2d Force Service Support Group (2d FSSG) at nearby Camp Lejeune were a natural choice for such a mission since the group already had developed rudimentary contingency plans for handling a Cuban exodus of up to 2,500 refugees in response to an August 1991 request from Admiral Paul D. Miller, Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet. The support group also had sent representatives to Guantanamo in September and October for further planning and participation in the October defensive exercise.¹⁰

Commanding the 2d FSSG was Brigadier General George H. Walls, Jr. General Walls, an engineer by training and a universally respected officer from Pennsylvania, had recently served away from the fleet as a professor of naval science. Many considered him the ideal combination of warrior and diplomat, providing firm yet humane leadership and possessing a gift for leading troops and trusting subordinates. Perhaps more than anything, it was General Walls’ hands-on leadership that won him respect. He had a reputation of being in touch with his troops and the situation. A simple anecdote tells of a U.S. Army sentry high in a watchtower at Guantanamo that found himself answering the general’s questions about his work. Not familiar with Marine Corps culture, the sentry was pleasantly surprised that a general officer would actually try to look at the world from a soldier’s point of view.¹¹

Among those holding the general in high esteem was a dedicated and professional member of the Service Support Group, Sergeant Major Douglas E. Berry, who was to deploy with the

general because of his earlier experience on joint task forces.

When Lieutenant General William M. Keys, then commander of Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, began to plan for the humanitarian operation in Guantanamo in mid-November, he turned to General Walls. On or about 20 November, General Keys sent the planning order and General Walls began to pull together the team he thought would be needed for the operation.¹² General Walls and his subordinate, Colonel Peter R. Stenner, who was then commander of Brigade Service Support Group 6 and about to become director of operations for the task force, drafted a table of organization for a JTF at Guantanamo. They drew heavily from the Marine Corps because Marines were, at least initially, a readily available and known quantity.¹³ *

Given its training and mission, 2d FSSG was already organized to establish and run expeditionary camps. Remembering the lessons of the so-called Mariel Boatlift of 1980, when more than 124,000 Cubans fled their country by boat to seek refuge in the U.S. during President Jimmy Carter's administration. Marines had worked with those refugees, and considering the type of work that needed to be done this time, General Walls and Colonel Stenner selected Marines and sailors for the job who were specialists in food service, engineering, and medical assistance. From the start, they also planned to reach outside the Marine Corps to select specialties that were not organic to the Service Support Group, such as the highly professional civil affairs capability of the U.S. Army, to allow other Services to provide a higher proportion of replacements when the Marines rotated home.¹⁴ Initially, they thought the joint task force would comprise a few hundred servicemen caring for no more than 2,500 migrants.

Back at Guantanamo, even though the initial 483 migrants had been brought ashore, pressure continued to mount as more migrants put to sea and were rescued by the Coast Guard. A temporary restraining order from the Second Federal District Court in Miami on 19 November complicated the situation by closing the option of quick repatriation, forcing the migrants to remain guests

* Sergeant Major Berry realized one of the problems the JTF would face would be the different ways each Service treated its members, and it would be important for the JTF's personnel policies to be as uniform as possible, especially with regard to benefits and discipline. He worked hard to make that happen, reaching out to all of the noncommissioned officers in the JTF. (Berry intvw)

of the armed forces for the time being. With the need for the JTF growing, General Walls acted quickly on a 22 November pre-deployment order stating "U.S. CinCLant is authorized to land refugees temporarily aboard NS [Naval Station] Guantanamo as a last resort." The order went on to direct the deployment of an advanced echelon and liaison officer team to Guantanamo to further preparations for the "possible" deployment of the JTF.¹⁵ On 23 November, the advance party left Camp Lejeune. Just two days later on 25 November, with six cutters in the harbor carrying 1,415 migrants on board, and another ship enroute with an additional 304 migrants, General Walls finally received a formal deployment order and literally packed his bags.¹⁶

According to the concept of operations, the Atlantic Fleet was to deploy a joint task force to Guantanamo to conduct temporary emergency humanitarian assistance and security operations. The order contained a number of interesting caveats, such as: the force should deploy "so as to

Back at Guantanamo, even though the initial 483 migrants had been brought ashore, pressure continued to mount as more migrants put to sea and were rescued by the Coast Guard.

[be] mostly self-sufficient" without the need for support from the Navy base; at the same time, no construction of tents or other temporary facilities were permitted until Norfolk obtained the approval of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The next day, as CinCLant authorized the Navy and the Coast Guard to offload the additional migrants, General Walls landed in Cuba and officially became the commander of Operation Safe Harbor, which was renamed two days later as Operation GTMO.¹⁷ An interesting footnote to the order that renamed the operation stated the anticipated length of the operation was "in excess of 30 days." The footnote indicates many in the higher echelons, although reluctant to commit, expected the crisis would not blow over quickly.

General Walls immediately went to work to get enough members of his task force on the ground to take control of Camp Bulkeley from the Navy, which was scheduled to occur 29 November.¹⁸ Then, working with the Navy, he had to ensure

8 A SKILLFUL SHOW OF STRENGTH

Camp Bulkeley could shelter as many as 2,500 migrants and make plans for possible expansion to another, better location at Camp McCalla, a former airfield on the coast near the heart of the base. (The camp was named for Commander Bowman H. McCalla, the commander of the squadron that had carried Sergeant John Quick to Cuba. The commander has been described as generally irascible and a friend of the Marine

appear to occupy it. The task force hoped to unload all the migrants from the anchored cutters by 2 December and to put them to work alongside the Marines, sailors, and soldiers helping to build their own camps.¹⁹ The intent was to construct adequate facilities for some 12,000 migrants and phase out Camp Bulkeley by 20 December, keeping those facilities in reserve or using them for special purposes. It was soon to become the



Photo courtesy of BGen George H. Walls, Jr.

In late 1991, Camp McCalla's rows of tents are clearly visible on the abandoned runway of the former airfield. The naval base's piers and the area known as "Mainside" are evident in the background.

Corps.) Although initially lacking in many needed facilities, the former runways, aprons, and hangars had obvious refugee camp potential. The migrants would not have to live in an environment of dust and sand, and while the hangars could not accommodate everyone, they were well suited as ready-made shelters for many of the migrants. The Joint Chiefs apparently approved further construction at the site and work started on 30 November, which was General Walls 49th birthday.

Time remained a critical element as the joint task force worked frantically to keep pace with the flow of refugees. As soon as U.S. servicemen erected a shelter, Haitian migrants seemed to

camp for migrants who had been cleared to proceed to the United States. The overriding theory was to separate the fortunate migrants from those who were still in limbo or awaiting repatriation to Haiti.²⁰

To meet the deadlines, many of General Walls' Marines worked 18-hour days. Even those Marines with other duties found themselves impressed into the task force. The barracks Marines, along with an artillery unit that had come to the base for an exercise, Battery H, 3d Battalion, 10th Marines, soon came under the operational control of the JTF, which reached the strength of 46 officers and 549 enlisted Marines by 30 November. Colonel Gary A. Blair, commanding



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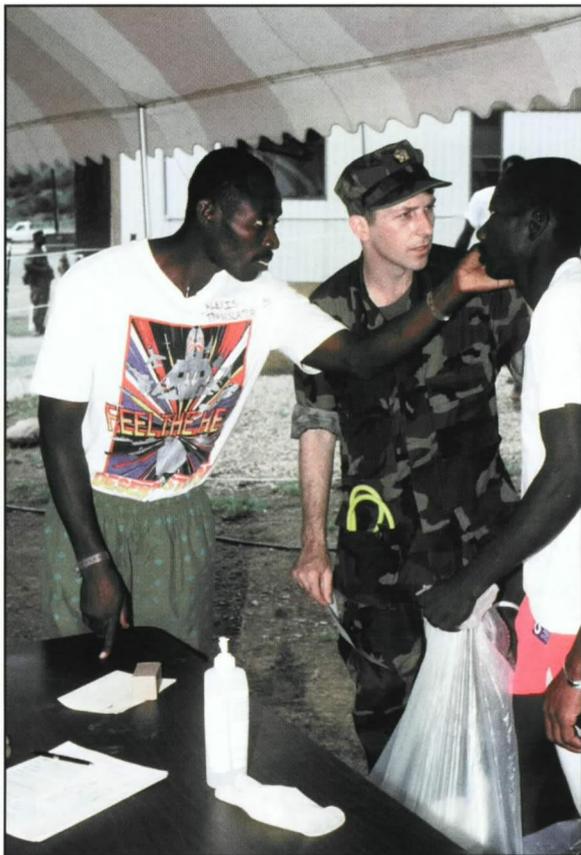
After disembarking from the USCG Vigilant (WMEC 617) at Guantanamo Bay, a group of Haitian migrants board a bus that will carry them to a humanitarian relief center at Camp McCalla. The migrants' faces convey the sense of apprehension that many felt on their first day at the naval base.

officer of the Marine Barracks and a common sense leader who got the job done without fanfare, was given command.²¹ Colonel Blair was especially happy to have Battery H under his control since that group had recently returned from Operation Provide Comfort, a large-scale refugee operation in Northern Iraq where Marines helped establish and run Kurdish refugee relocation camps.²²

In addition to the Marines, approximately 400 members of the task force were from other Services. There were now 1,477 migrants in the camps and more than 1,000 sat waiting on ships in the harbor.²³ * Although responsibilities shifted, the Army generally administered Camp McCalla while the Marines controlled Camp Bulkeley and

provided external security in the form of on-call reaction forces for both camps. Among the many competing priorities was the urgent need for medical treatment, or at least triage. Many of the migrants had never had any kind of medical treatment in their lives, and there was an abundance of communicable diseases that required immediate treatment to avert the specter of epidemics. Navy (and later U.S. Air Force) medical personnel set to work and quickly made enormous strides in the management of this public health problem. The corpsmen, nurses, and doctors went aggressively in search of patients and maintained a 24-hour presence in the camps. A migrant could see a corpsman any time of the day or night. Migrants with communicable diseases were treated and, if necessary, isolated from the general population. Pregnant women—at one time there were some 400 in the camps—received special attention. These were the first steps in establishing patient-practitioner relationships. One small gauge of the strength of these relationships was the case of one migrant who refused to return to Haiti until he

* By the beginning of December 1991, the joint task force had banned the use of the term “refugee” for the Haitians at Guantanamo. They were to be referred to as “migrants” to avoid the impression, especially when speaking to journalists, that they had the legal status of refugees. (Maj Theodore R. McKeldin III, Notes on Operation GTMO, Dec00, GTMO/Haiti Collection, MCHC)



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As part of the processing at Camp McCalla, each migrant received a quick medical checkup. For many this was the first time in their lives that a health care provider had seen them.

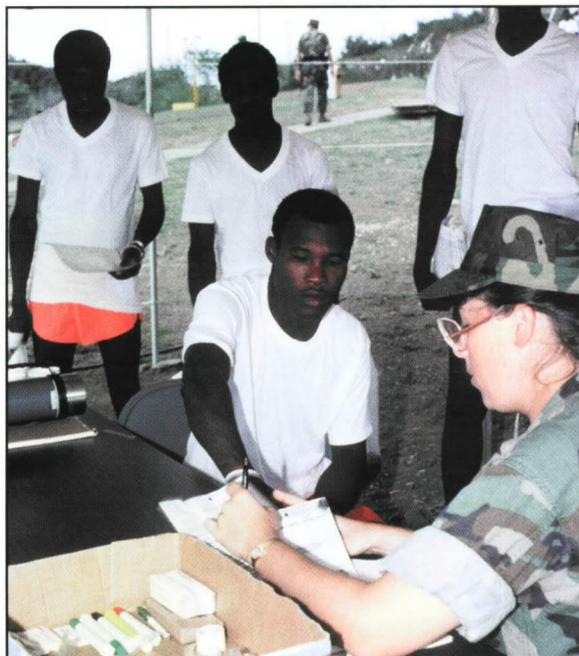
had completed the prescribed round of dental work.²⁴

Another early priority, one that received the personal attention of General Walls, was the promulgation of a set of rules of engagement. This document began with a reminder that "Haitians are not EPWs [enemy prisoners of war]. Treat them humanely with dignity and respect. ... Use only the minimum force necessary." General Walls intended to set the tone for his command's relations with the migrants through the rules of engagement and his own brand of leadership. He maintained that tenor throughout his time at Guantanamo.²⁵

Another important aspect was the development of the civil affairs concept of operations. Civil affairs occupied a central role in Operation GTMO. It dealt with the day-to-day management of the camps and was conducted by a well-trained and well-prepared group of soldiers from the Army's 96th Civil Affairs Detachment, 96th Civil Affairs Battalion.

The plan, already elaborated by 11 December, was split into three phases. Phase I covered short-term actions required over the first 30 days for migrant security, safety, and welfare. These included the closeout of Camp Bulkeley, the refinement of migrant living arrangements to permit the reunification of extended families, providing some means of communication with relatives in Haiti, and establishing a photo identity system. Phase II was the transition to a steady-state camp in the period from day 30 to day 120. It included the provision of religious services, the creation of a community council, and the employment of migrants in construction and maintenance projects. Phase III, which would run from day 120 until the end of the operation, would emphasize public education, cottage industries, and the publication of a camp newspaper.²⁶

The separation of migrants into various categories was a particularly sensitive issue. From the start, the JTF had been organizing individuals into categories: families, single males, unaccompanied minors, "screened-in" for immigration to the United States, and "screened-out" for repatriation to Haiti. Most of those who were screened-in were able to claim they were victims of political persecution. Some of these categories, while mak-



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A Marine processes paperwork for Haitian migrants at Camp McCalla. Individuals were divided into two basic groups, those slated for immigration to the United States and those to be returned to Haiti.