

After a few more days of stalemate, there was a solution of sorts. A senior Jamaican diplomat attended a ceremony on board the *Comfort* on 20 July. He praised the joint humanitarian contributions of the Haitian and American governments to resolve the plight of the migrants. Even though the diplomatic impasse between Jamaica and the U.S. had not clearly been resolved, the JTF treated the ceremony as closure and the *Comfort* simply pulled anchor and sailed to Guantanamo. Once there, the Haitians resisted disembarking, saying they wanted to stay in the care of their familiar Marine protectors rather than facing the unknown soldiers waiting on the pier. Marine officers and Red Cross officials eventually persuaded the migrants they had to disembark. But before they left, they presented Lieutenant Colonel Allen with a hand-lettered certificate of appreciation signed by the camp leaders attesting the Marines had accomplished their work.¹⁹

Soon after their arrival at Guantanamo, Allen and his Marines staged an unusual ceremony. As part of a long-planned reorganization, their battalion was to be re-designated 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, part of a famous regiment that had fought at Belleau Wood and been the military

home of the legendary Spanish-American War hero Sergeant John H. Quick. On 23 July, Lieutenant Colonel Allen and the regimental commander, Colonel Richard A. Huck, led a route march from the pier where the *Comfort* had docked to Cuzco Hills, where Sergeant Quick had earned the Medal of Honor for signaling the fleet while under fire. With Quick's sword at hand, Colonel Huck furled 2d Battalion, 4th Marines' battle colors and replaced it with 2d Battalion, 6th Marines' colors. A few days later, Allen left Company F at Guantanamo with JTF 160 and led the rest of the battalion back to Camp Lejeune for what would prove to be only a short respite from migrant operations for his troops.²⁰

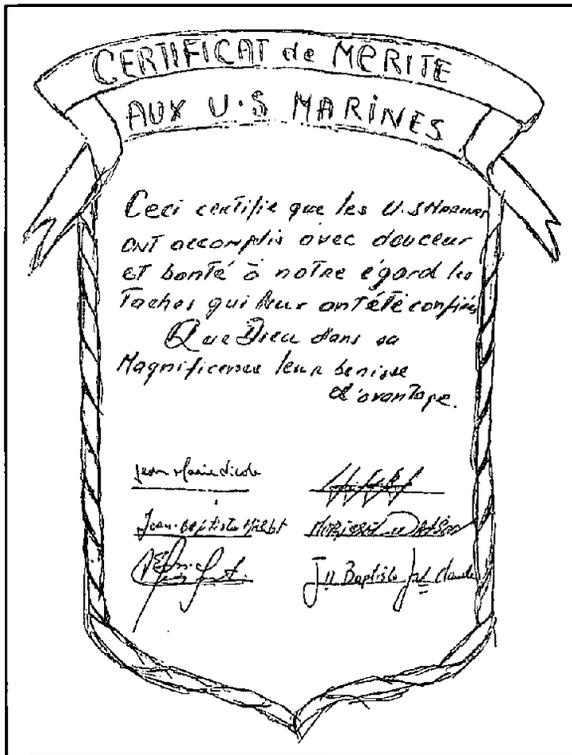
The Camp at Grand Turk

The most exotic sidelight in the history of Marines in the Caribbean in the 1990s was the plan to process Haitian migrants in the Turks and Caicos Islands, a dependent territory of the United Kingdom occupying a glistening stretch of ocean between the Bahamas and Haiti. Within the territory, JTF planners focused on Grand Turk Island. It was an unusual place for most Marines.

About eight-miles long and one-mile wide, Grand Turk is, in the words of one Marine, an "austere paradise" at the eastern end of a string of low-lying limestone islands dotted by extensive marshes and mangrove swamps.²¹ Only 2 percent of the territory is arable, which gives the visitor an idea of its severity. One of the territory's principal cash crops was salt, evaporated from seawater intentionally trapped on land that was at or below sea level.

The capital of the territory was Cockburn Town, which reminded the same Marine of the Combat Town training area at Camp Lejeune, a set of partially completed houses that generations of Marines have fought over. Cockburn Town had little to offer apart from a scattering of concrete buildings, some of which appear to be permanently under construction. Among the buildings were one or two hotels, including the Kitina Hotel, which had a relaxed, barefoot charm. There also were a number of dive shops that served the many divers who found paradise in the deep clear water. Three to four hundred meters offshore was a 7,000-foot deep wall for divers to explore, which made the absence of luxury ashore almost irrelevant.

The Turks and Caicos Islands were one of Britain's few remaining dependencies and had a



Courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen
A hand-lettered "Certificate of Merit," written in French and signed by six Haitian migrants, was presented to the Marines on the *Comfort*.



civil service run largely by the British. Remnants of the Colonial Service, the civil servants were largely white and included a governor appointed by the Queen. The islands' largely black population dominated the legislature. While there was little ethnic tension on the islands, there were occasional brief outbursts of violence with racial overtones, such as when poor black citizens expressed frustration with prosperous and sometimes overbearing white bar owners in the summer of 1994. While that attitude created some anticipation among Marines, they generally found all of the islanders to be more than friendly. The locals could not do enough for their military visitors, literally opening their homes and businesses to them.²²

Partly because it was a British dependency—the British government being generally receptive to American overtures and the local government remembering the benefits of having one of the lend-lease American bases on Grand Turk—the U.S. Government, with Joint Task Force 160 at the forefront, conceived the contingency plan to process Haitian migrants on Grand Turk. When it became clear the Jamaican option, by itself, would be inadequate, the Grand Turk option took on new luster.²³ On 3 June, the Clinton

administration applauded the general declaration by the government of Turks and Caicos Islands that it would allow the U.S. to process migrants on its territory, and the JTF soon dispatched officers to the island on a reconnaissance mission.²⁴

From 6 to 8 June 1994, Major Brian J. Vincent, executive officer of JTF 160's Marine component, visited potential sites on Grand Turk. He first surveyed, and rejected, a truly desolate 405-acre tract that had been a salt flat in the 1950s and 1960s that the island government had proposed. Then, despite the limited port facilities and small airfield, Major Vincent saw potential for an ashore migrant support facility (AMSF) for as many as 2,500 migrants at the southern tip of the island. Even so, the chosen site was unprepossessing: a 52-acre patch of rocks, scrub brush, and tangle weed that was far from level.²⁵

When Major Vincent reported his findings to MarFor 160 headquarters, which had been established at Guantanamo Bay, the staff discussed various courses of action and began to draft operations plans and orders. One draft directed a small task force to deploy to Grand Turk rapidly "to construct, support, sustain, and provide security for the AMSF." Along with the ashore migrant support facility, the task force would operate a

migrant processing center, dividing migrants into the now familiar categories of unscreened, screened-in, and screened-out. The order defined success as the "secure, peaceful, and orderly processing of Haitian migrants."²⁶

A red-letter date for the Grand Turk operation was 19 June 1994, when MarFor 160's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Redlich, also became commander, Joint Task Force Grand Turk Island, and a colorful, popular Sergeant Major, Royce S. Restivo, became the senior noncommissioned officer of the small JTF. In one of the many reorganizations that would occur during this deployment, the JTF absorbed much of MarFor 160 headquarters, along with Company C, 8th Marines, which had been attached to 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. The principal Army component on Grand Turk was the 401st Military Police Company. There also were a number of small but vital detachments from other Services, including the 56th Air Transportable Hospital from the Air Force and some very hard-working Seabees from Naval Mobile Construction Battalion 74.²⁷

Within hours of his appointment, Lieutenant Colonel Redlich flew to Grand Turk to conduct his own site survey. He was another in the line of

energetic, hands-on, common sense Marine leaders working on migrant operations during these years, and he wanted to see for himself exactly what had to be done. Assisting in the start-up phase was General Williams' lawyer, Lieutenant Colonel John M. McAdams, Jr., a problem solver and the kind of lawyer the Marines needed. General Williams was thinking of McAdams when he quipped, tongue in cheek that "you don't want to get too close to your lawyer, but you never want to deploy without him."²⁸

One of the first steps was to reach a detailed understanding with the local government, which had some reservations about having Haitian migrants on the island for any length of time. The prospect of more illegal or semi-legal Haitian migrants was troubling to them given the location of the islands. Haitian migrants, albeit in small numbers, had been coming ashore for years. The population of the island was about 3,000, and now the U.S. Government wanted to house as many as 2,500 Haitians in a camp on Grand Turk. The islands' government also had its own agenda. In return for its cooperation, the Turks and Caicos Islands wanted the U.S. military to undertake a number of civil engineering projects, such as the



Photo courtesy of LtCol John M. McAdams, Jr.

Cockburn Town was the capital of Turks and Caicos Islands, a British overseas territory where JTF 160 planned to conduct migrant operations. Note the sign for the Supreme Court of the territory over the staircase. There was definitely a kind of island charm about the local government.



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Robert Hall, the Minister of Immigration, Labor, and Public Works of Turks and Caicos, signs the memorandum of understanding between the United States and the island territory which would allow JTF 160 to construct and operate a camp for migrants. A U.S. State Department representative, Richard Devine (left), and the local Chief Minister, Charles Misick, look on.

renovation of the abandoned U.S. Navy base at the northern tip of Grand Turk and improvements to a pre-existing facility for Haitians.

Although a basic memorandum of understanding between the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, and Turks and Caicos was signed on 18 June, a number of issues remained unresolved. For example, it was unclear whether the proposed site for the migrant facility was on private or public land, and the local government attempted without success to involve the JTF with a local citizen in this long-standing dispute. Another issue was whether the American servicemen should be armed. The chief constable, a retired British policeman who had not fired a shot in anger in some 30 years of active service, successfully argued for stringent safeguards on the issue. Even though it was not a smooth process—in mid-July parts of the memorandum would be renegotiated—Lieutenant Colonel Redlich found the overall task of dealing with the local government to be an enjoyable and challenging departure from his normal routine.²⁹

With the legalities more or less settled, the mini-JTF could turn to the business at hand. It was

an enormous undertaking for the 700 to 800 Marines, sailors, airmen, and soldiers who served on Grand Turk. Since the islands had little or nothing to offer in the way of infrastructure or goods and services apart from salt—and there was a limit to the amount of salt the JTF needed—a phenomenal amount of equipment and supplies had to be imported.

Once the Navy made the essential deliveries, the Seabee construction crews began their work. They cleared and graded more than 50 acres and started to build an infrastructure for the camp. There were other tasks which planners might have taken for granted at other locations, such as providing for water purification and desalinization, and establishing a field kitchen and dining facility that could feed more than 3,000 people.³⁰

There was a race against time in June and July, and the advance elements of the joint task force worked at a nearly superhuman pace. The basic question remained: would the camp on Grand Turk be ready soon enough to take the overflow from Jamaica, or to replace the Jamaican effort altogether? This was important because the policy-makers still wanted to avoid a sequel to the

open-ended Operation GTMO. The rear echelon of the JTF at Guantanamo could support the operations on Grand Turk or in Jamaica, but it was better not to use Camp McCalla or Camp Bulkeley for large numbers of migrants.

In late June, like Redlich before him, General Williams visited the island to judge the situation for himself. His first impression was that he had somehow landed in Lonesome Dove, an expeditionary air base in the Gulf War named for the forlorn Texas cow town in a Larry McMurtry novel. "For most of the hours of the day," McMurtry had written in *Lonesome Dove*, "and most of the months of the year, the sun had the town trapped deep in the dust, far out in the chaparral flats, a heaven for snakes and horned toads. ... There was not even a respectable shade tree within ... miles."³¹

But through the dust, General Williams was able to see the outlines of the facility taking shape. "There are almost no buildings on the island ... [but] ... [f]irst steps are taken. ... [Seabees] are there pushing dirt."³² By the time he was ready to leave the island, General Williams was satisfied Lieutenant Colonel Redlich would push the right issues. To maintain the pressure, Redlich

and his staff moved to Grand Turk from Guantanamo on 26 June.

Nevertheless, doubts about Grand Turk persisted, especially in the general's mind. The general questioned Redlich about the status of the camp and was told a barebones facility could be in place by 29 June, but only if the mission's much-needed airlift resources were diverted from Guantanamo. General Williams once again noted that Grand Turk did not appear to be a workable solution for large numbers of migrants. "[It] is more expensive per capita than *Comfort* since it is not expandable and will require a huge logistics effort." Given the scale of that effort, this was a significant understatement. His interim conclusion was that "[w]e are [simply] delaying the inevitable"—that is, housing and processing migrants at Guantanamo.³³

It was during the next few days that General Williams became acutely aware of the continuing problems in Jamaica, and of the hundreds of Haitian migrants often literally just over the horizon waiting to be rescued. That led to more discussions about alternatives for processing the migrants in a variety of places as diverse as Surinam, Guantanamo, Panama, and later, St.



Photo courtesy of LtCol John M. McAdams, Jr.

Ready for business but wanting for customers, the migrant camp, which Marines and Seabees worked so hard to construct on Grand Turk, sits idle in the summer of 1994.

Lucia, not to mention tiny and remote Dominica. There also was talk about a long-term bilateral agreement with the Bahamas.³⁴

Given the continuing uncertainties of the situation, neither the Grand Turk nor the Jamaica operation ended as the Guantanamo operation shifted into a new and higher gear. General Williams decided to give himself the maximum amount of flexibility by formalizing the system of maintaining three subordinate joint task forces—

As General Walls had noted two years earlier, the military used concertina wire for fences because that is what it had, not because it was the material of choice.

the one at Guantanamo, which was becoming the main effort after all, as well as the JTFs on Grand Turk and off Jamaica. Each subordinate commander would have the freedom to conduct operations as he saw fit, while General Williams would reserve for himself issues of resource allocation and overarching policy.³⁵

A few days later, on 9 July, General Williams was unhappy to learn the facility on Grand Turk was not going to open on time. (The target date was 12 July.) On 10 July, he was equally unhappy to learn the Turks and Caicos government did not want any Haitian migrant to spend more than seven days on the island. General Williams concluded this limitation would make Grand Turk more of a liability than an asset, since it meant migrants would have to go from there to other intermediate destinations—just the kind of situation the general wanted to avoid.³⁶

The scale, complexity, and cost of the work on Grand Turk weighed heavily on the debit side of the ledger. Lieutenant Colonel Redlich's troops had been continuing their Herculean efforts to meet the challenge of turning the chaparral flats into a working camp on schedule. On 26 June, there were only four general-purpose tents ready for migrants. Six days later, there were 145 such tents neatly arranged in 10 separate compounds. Continuing to work at full speed, the Seabees eventually constructed 11 elaborate concrete latrines, complete with running water and underground pipes leading to a treatment plant. When the final tally was made, the Seabees had laid a

staggering total of 10,000 feet of pipe to meet all of the camp's plumbing needs. Subsequent reports referred to the latrines as "the finest engineering achievement of the JTF."³⁷

As if they had not already done enough, the Seabees continued the work of constructing and maintaining roads in and around the migrant facility, which meant harvesting, transporting, and compacting more than 5,000 cubic yards of coral. All members of the JTF pitched in to lay 40,000 linear feet of concertina wire to fence the individual compounds from one another. As at Guantanamo, the intent was not to create a prison, but to create and maintain administrative units. As General Walls had noted two years earlier, the military used concertina wire for fences because that is what it had, not because it was the material of choice.

Looking offshore, the Navy and Coast Guard addressed the island's hydrographic problem, which made it difficult and dangerous for deep draft and V-hulled vessels to approach. Without a solution to this particular problem, the Coast Guard could not deliver migrants to the AMSF, which was the prerequisite for the entire exercise. If migrants could not come ashore, all the other work was for nothing. In short order, the two Services agreed on the installation of a 200-foot extension of the existing pier by adding two 100-foot floating barges. The Navy's Underwater Construction Team 1 ultimately performed the work, sinking chains and moorings to anchor the barges.

One of the final steps to ready the camp for occupancy was for virtually all hands to go on line and sweep the area, picking up any foreign objects that could injure the migrants, or that migrants could use to injure their custodians in the event of a disturbance. Some of the lessons of Operation GTMO were clearly not forgotten. When it was over, *The New York Times* stated the cost of erecting the tents and repairing the infrastructure of Grand Turk was \$18 million.³⁸ The result of all this hard work was that, on the evening of 11 July, Redlich and assorted local dignitaries gathered in the glare of a dozen mobile military light generators, not too different from stage lights, and declared the camp "complete."³⁹

But complete did not mean operational and ready to receive migrants. The local government had yet to ratify the requisite enabling legislation, and there was still no sign of the representatives of the various civilian agencies of the U.S.



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Guantanamo Bay's Camp Phillips, which had a capacity of approximately 2,000, served as billeting for many members of JTF 160. It was far from sumptuous, but it was better than other encampments. There was a degree of comfort, with some air-conditioned spaces, recreational opportunities, a messhall, and a bathhouse.

Government who would actually determine the migrants' status. (JTF 160 existed to run camps, not for deciding who was qualified to immigrate to the United States.) The small task force on Grand Turk entered the first of many weeks of uncertainty and waiting after the intensive work of making the camp ready. Although there was a certain sense of anticlimax, the time was not uneventful.

The highlight of the first week of waiting was a story about the camp in the London-based tabloid *The Evening Standard* with the sensational headline, "I Find Secret Invasion Base." Possibly convinced he had found a staging area for the invasion of Haiti, visiting British journalist Howard Smith wrote the story. He studiously avoided talking to anyone in an official capacity who might have set him straight.⁴⁰

The JTF attempted to remedy the situation by establishing a link with the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FO), and by granting Smith an exclusive two-hour interview (of course, there were no other journalists clamoring for a

story about Grand Turk). During that interview, Redlich's public affairs officer stressed the humanitarian mission of the small base, but it was a pointless effort. The headline on Smith's next story, published on 14 July, read "The Marines That The FO Says Do Not Exist." In part, the story exposed the work of the public affairs officer. As Smith wrote: "Marine Lieutenant Pete Mitchell, acting as spokesman, had launched a charm offensive to calm fears about the role of the base." Three days later, Smith left the island, never to return, although he did make one call to Lieutenant Mitchell for an update. In the words of the command chronology: "he was given a cordial, although, we are certain, frustratingly unsubstantive response."⁴¹*

On 11 July, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., and the Commander of Marine Forces, Atlantic, Lieutenant

* The press officer who gave Smith a complete briefing and tour of the facilities was 1stLt Peter J. Mitchell.

General Robert B. Johnston, a familiar face from Desert Storm where he served as General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's chief of staff, appeared at Guantanamo Bay and requested to visit the operations at Grand Turk and Jamaica. The whirlwind tour of the entire joint task force included a "windshield" tour of Grand Turk. Accompanied by the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Harold G. Overstreet, the Commandant gathered the Marines on Grand Turk in a box formation in their spacious galley tent and told them he was awed by their accomplishments. The Commandant was quick to add they needed to stay flexible, since the future of the camp remained uncertain. Despite that message, Marine morale remained high; the Marines' sense of accomplishment and the Commandant's praise were genuine. General Williams also had consistently conveyed the same

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message. Recording the Commandant's visit in his diary, the general noted he was "proud of the troops and their work."⁴²

Back at Guantanamo, General Williams reflected on the camp and its future. "Camp is ready," he wrote, "but we made a dustbowl when we cleared it. It will be awful for migrants. Still no word on whether we'll use the place. ACOM [U.S. Atlantic Command] wants to put it in caretaker [status]."⁴³ Caretaker status was shorthand for holding Grand Turk in reserve in case other facilities could not handle the flow. For planners, the erratic flow of migrants was puzzling: on one day, 1,000 new migrants arrived and on the next there were none. But the overall numbers appeared to be dropping.

A few days later, as Lieutenant Colonel Redlich prepared to acknowledge the local government's enabling legislation, which was finally ready for signature, General Williams asked him to prepare for two contingencies: migrant processing and caretaker status. Reflecting on the kind of "mis-

sion creep" that occurred on Grand Turk—first there was a concept, then a survey, followed by initial efforts which in turn called forth further efforts, costing money and manpower bit by bit until the sum total was large, even prohibitive—the general noted: "I think I have been caught up in the emotion of the place: we built it, we'll use it. [But] if the migrant flow doesn't pick up, we don't need the place. [In any case] we ought to preserve the ability to open it."⁴⁴ In a message to Grand Turk, he stressed his decision did not reflect a lack of confidence in Redlich and his troops. On the contrary, he went on record as being "immensely proud" of them.⁴⁵

It was more than a little ironic that, at the camp on Grand Turk on 19 July, the day after General Williams had told Redlich to prepare for caretaker status, a group of dignitaries gathered in a temper tent—an innovative expeditionary tent that was usually air conditioned—to celebrate another milestone in the history of the on-island facility. The dignitaries included representatives from the Department of State, their British counterparts from the Foreign Office, and of course the press, though without Mr. Smith of *The Evening Standard*. Their purpose was to watch the Chief Minister of Turks and Caicos, Oswald O. Skippings, sign the Immigrant (Haitian Migrant Temporary Detention) Notice of 1994, which occurred with suitable fanfare. Redlich then offered a tour of his domain, which included a demonstration of the capabilities of the deployable mass population identification and tracking system, a computerized system for keeping track of the migrant population through the use of irremovable bracelets with embedded bar codes that were now an accepted and important part of migrant operations. Grand Turk was finally open and ready for business, but there were no customers.⁴⁶

Much of the pressure on Grand Turk eased, but members of the task force did not sit idle. Some of the troops, especially the Marine infantry detachment from 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, and a group of Army military police, used the time to train, focusing on civil disturbance contingencies and preparing to run a migrant camp. Others found new missions. Captain Suzanne Ainsworth, USAR, of Civil Affairs Direct Support Team 53, was a licensed veterinarian. Together with other volunteers, she launched an animal health campaign, which included emergency surgery on a cat that had somehow been impaled on a giant fishhook. The surgery occurred on a table outside



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HC3 Jeff Mueller of the 2d Force Service Support Group's medical battalion gives a Haitian child her required shots at Camp McCalla. Two tents were set up to administer the three immunizations.

a local restaurant with improvised instruments. Another of her projects was the castration of local stallions. Grand Turk was overpopulated with wild horses and donkeys, which roamed the island freely, posing threats to motorists and eating the little bit of greenery that managed to push its way through the rocky soil.⁴⁷

The JTF's Roman Catholic chaplain, Commander Joseph R. Lamonde, USN, was similarly active, finding and ministering to a number of outcasts on the island. These included a handful of Haitian and Cuban migrants who had almost literally washed ashore and had remained in legal and social limbo. The six Cuban migrants were held in the detention facility at the northern end of the island. They had no legal status or prospects for a better future. Father Lamonde, sometimes accompanied by Captain Ainsworth in her civil affairs capacity, visited them often, providing spiritual nourishment and health and comfort items. There was another project that bears mention. Lieutenant Colonel Redlich was lucky enough to have among his officers an excellent command historian, the cheerful, energetic, and athletic Captain Franz J. Gayl, who served as operations officer on Grand Turk. Captain Gayl used the time to give life to an unusually complete and colorful command chronology, turning the normally dry recitation of facts into a document that transports the reader to the island and lets him feel the dust and sweat and pride of accomplishment.⁴⁸

When the day's work was done, there was some unusual liberty, especially for those who liked the water. The local boatmen would bring their boats onto the beach, and a Marine could literally step out of his uniform and into a marine

adventure of a different kind. Even the liberty on land was not bad—a few beers and a simple meal at a friendly establishment like the Kitina.⁴⁹

By late July, Joint Task Force Grand Turk Island was definitely on a downward glide path. Phases I and II of the contingency plan for caretaker status began on 25 July. The air transportable hospital was redeployed, along with a number of personnel. This caused some distress to the government of Turks and Caicos, which sought reassurances the U.S. Government would complete the program of public works per the agreement. The local officials were even ready to agree the AMSF could be used as a safe haven and allow migrants to stay on island longer than seven days.⁵⁰

But there was ample room for migrants at Guantanamo, and the migrant facility on the island continued to ramp down. The approach of Tropical Storm Chris, which appeared headed for Grand Turk in mid-August, accelerated the final phases of the withdrawal. There was a surge of C-130 cargo aircraft and the USS *Whidbey Island* (LSD 41) appeared off shore, fortuitously empty. Through more hard work, the ship's company and the rump JTF loaded most of its remaining assets and personnel, which numbered about 150 at this point, onto the ship.⁵¹

In the end, the storm did not hit the island, but the U.S. Government kept most, if not all, of its promises to the government of Turks and Caicos. Various facilities were upgraded, and even the request to remove the elaborate plumbing facilities the Seabees had built was fulfilled. When the last U.S. serviceman left, there was only an empty, dusty plain where the camp had been.⁵²

The story of the small but accomplished JTF was almost over. When there was a surge in the numbers of Cuban migrants during August, planners in Norfolk briefly considered ordering a return to Grand Turk. But after all that had happened, General Williams deemed this a "nutty idea." Thankfully for him, it did not go very far. By 30 August it was almost forgotten. His professional life full enough with one large migrant camp, General Williams breathed a sigh of relief and noted in his diary: "Heard that the TCI [Turks and Caicos Island] camp may not happen. Be still my heart."⁵³

Back at Guantanamo Bay

Guantanamo remained a flurry of activity while events in Jamaica and on Grand Turk unfolded. In

May, Marines from the barracks were busy preparing Camp Bulkeley for possible use by Haitian migrants. They also administered the camp for a handful of migrants who came ashore at Guantanamo before the JTF took charge in late June. Guantanamo then became the temporary home for the Marine support components of JTF

Guantanamo was directed primarily by the Army component of the JTF under the command of Colonel Michael Pearson. The Army's job was to establish and operate the processing center for screened-in Haitians at Camp McCalla. Marines provided the external security outside the confines of the camps. Company C, 1st Battalion, 8th



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This scene at Camp McCalla in the summer of 1994 is reminiscent of similar scenes two year earlier. Like their predecessors, the new wave of Haitian migrants adapted to camp procedures. Here they wait behind concertina wire for daily supplies.

160, including Combat Service Support Detachment 160 (CSSD-160) and elements of 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. From a deserted hangar at the north end of McCalla Field, these units worked to support fellow Marines in Jamaica and, later, on Grand Turk. The living conditions were rudimentary at first, consisting of tents pitched in the dusty sand around Camp Bulkeley. Later, when the Air Force added a modicum of civilization to the JTF, the units moved to air conditioned, air-transportable accordion shelters at Philips Park, a more habitable community much closer to Mainside than the isolated Camp Bulkeley at the far reaches of the base.⁵⁴

While General Williams was in Jamaica,

Marines, temporarily attached to 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, trained continuously for that mission.⁵⁵ The barracks Marines' primary mission was protecting the base and they remained the security force of last resort at Guantanamo. They were authorized to use deadly force to protect vital installations from external threats, which once again included migrants, and any assistance they could lend to General Williams' JTF was secondary. The JTF, of course, viewed the Marines' mission priorities in reverse, a difference that would surface in the coming months.

The Army's processing center for screened-in refugees at Camp McCalla became more important as the operation in Jamaica waned and the



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LtCol Rodney L. Johnson, commander of the U.S. Army's 720th Military Police Battalion, talks to Haitian migrants who jumped the concertina wire of Camp McCalla to stage a peaceful protest rally.

responsibility for processing all refugees shifted to Guantanamo Bay. By late June, General Williams was referring to Guantanamo as “a major center” in its own right and a place that could accommodate up to 12,500 migrants at any one time, a previously unexpected figure.⁵⁶ Guantanamo became a safe haven in early July following a change in the Clinton administration’s policy, which gave rescued migrants only two options: return to Haiti or go to a safe haven. Migrants could stay at a safe haven until the dangers at home had abated, however long that took. Even with the change of policy, the Navy and Coast Guard still were rescuing 2,000 to 3,000 migrants per day. Those not wanting to return to Haiti became guests of the JTF for an indefinite period.⁵⁷

General Williams established a migrant policy at Guantanamo based on a common sense set of priorities that followed the theory of psychologist Abraham H. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs—that is, you do not care about shelter until you have enough to eat, you do not care about recreation until you have shelter, and so forth. Once the migrants had been rescued from drowning, the first priorities would be simple: food and water, shelter, and a cot. Those were Williams’ indispen-

sable minimums for every migrant. Once those needs were satisfied, refinements such as sewage and bathing, bare necessities anywhere else, were addressed. These presented a real challenge for the base because of antiquated water and sewage systems. In one of his messages to Norfolk, Williams said he would “set up makeshift camps without facilities,” adding that conditions, which had never been particularly good, were “becoming very austere for the migrants.”⁵⁸

The desperate struggle to stay ahead of the flow of migrants continued throughout the first half of July. Members of the JTF worked 14-hour days, seven days a week, performing myriad tasks from pitching camps to patrolling perimeters to emptying portable toilets, often in stifling heat. The resulting living conditions did not improve for some time. As one reporter described it: “The migrants live in more than 1,500 tan and green tents that carpet an old runway and the tarmac alongside, consuming most of the available flat space. ... Each tent is crammed with cots, and rolls of concertina wire wind through the vast encampment dividing the refugees into seven communities of 2,000 to 3,000 each.”⁵⁹

It was difficult just to feed everyone on time,

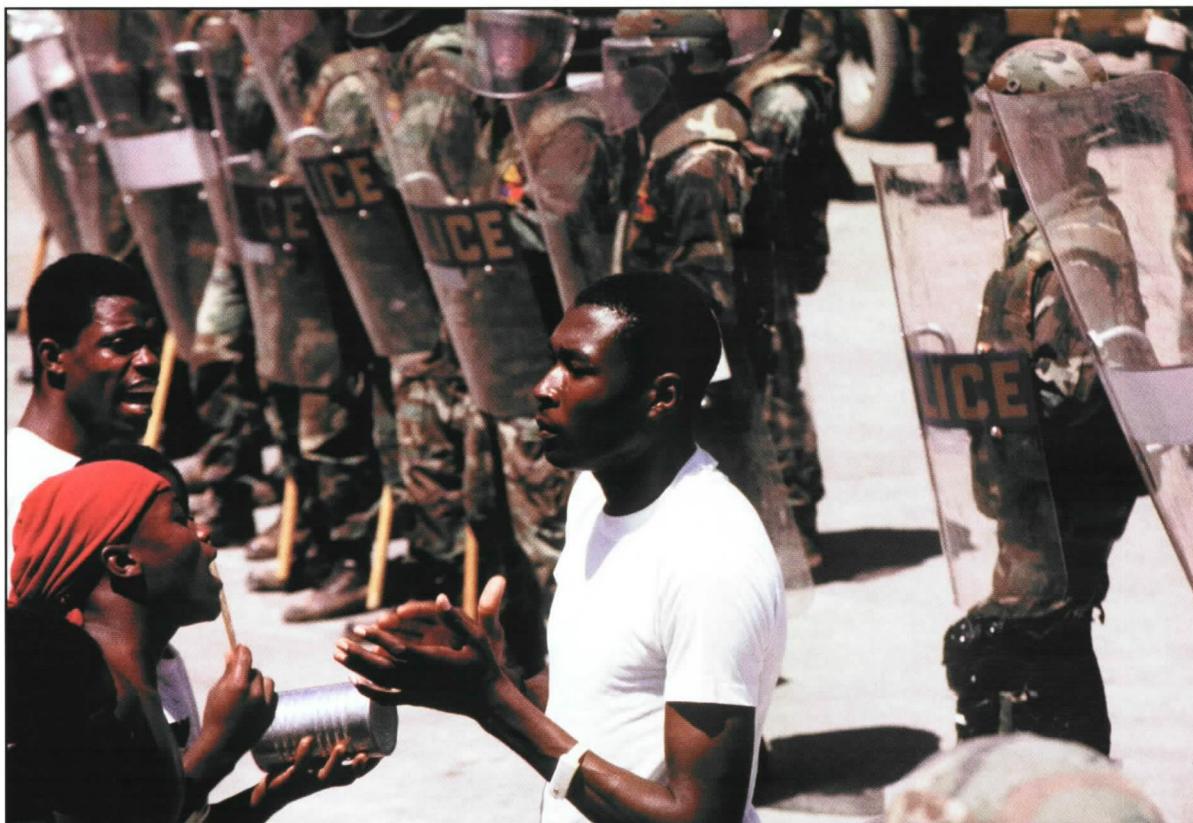
let alone to provide the appropriate Caribbean food. In one of the nearby hangars, U.S. officials sat behind rows of desks explaining to refugee the options of returning to Haiti or living in a safe haven, possibly in another country in the region. (The administration's diplomatic initiative to find other countries willing to assist continued.) Not surprisingly, relatively few, about 30 percent according to one estimate, opted to return home. To the migrants, anything seemed better than living in their impoverished homeland under military rule.⁶⁰

Often adding to the burden of running the operation was the stream of visitors who came to Guantanamo, not always to help. Although the JTF had an open door policy and left the press to draw its own conclusions, one reporter pressed General Williams to admit he was running "a concentration camp."⁶¹ Very senior officers, including the incumbent Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General John M. Shalikashvili, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Mundy, came in droves and offered both support and criticism.⁶²

General Shalikashvili increased the heat on the

JTF by speaking in terms of handling 28,000 migrants, which represented another massive upward shift in numbers. Adding to the pressure of such high-level scrutiny, General Williams discovered a few days later that one of his own officers was jumping the chain-of-command and calling the White House directly with problems. The officer was immediately relieved. Along similar lines, a well-meaning but misdirected offer from a lawyer at a nationally recognized law school offered to send 50 lawyers to Guantanamo to work with migrants. The JTF, pointing out that its problems did not stem from a shortage of lawyers, politely rejected the proposal.⁶³

Throughout the process, General Williams and his subordinates worried about the security of the camps. They remembered the challenges and migrant demonstrations General Walls had faced and wanted to avoid similar outbreaks, especially since the current operation was so much larger and more complex. Fortunately, the initial disturbances were relatively minor: complaints about the food, some heated words and arm-waving about inaction by the U.S. Government, and a threat to go on a hunger strike if the U.S. did not



DVIC DN-ST-98-00709

Surrounded by military police in riot gear, migrants chanted and danced to deliver their message. There was no violence.



DVIC DM-ST-97-01836

The “disruptive” Haitians are surrounded by military police from the 402st and 64th Military Police Companies, loaded onto buses, and taken to an isolation camp where they were closely monitored.

invade Haiti.⁶⁴ As time went on, conditions did improve somewhat. In the second half of the month, there actually were days when the migrant population did not increase. The numbers hovered around an increasingly manageable 20,000, and the JTF was able to make progress in turning the camps from makeshift shelters into small communities complete with village economies, a semblance of self-government, elementary schools, preventive medicine programs, and, ultimately, a Creole-language radio station and newspapers. The migrants themselves learned how to run the kitchens and helped cook the food to their own taste, which eliminated one obstacle.⁶⁵

Near the end of the month, the JTF and the barracks Marines met to define their respective roles in case of a disturbance, an ever-present possibility despite the improving conditions. As General Williams commented in his diary, there was “no question that it will get ugly if we can’t continue to show continuous improvement.”⁶⁶ His comment applied mostly to living conditions on the base, but he also considered a solution to the political stalemate and ambiguous immigration policy as one of the needs of the migrant popu-

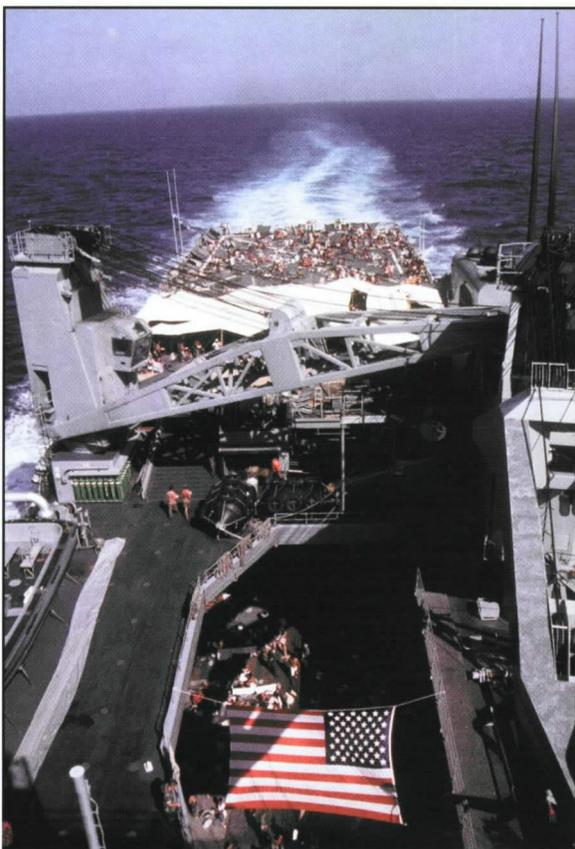
lation. After all, the U.S. Government was essentially detaining a large group of Haitian migrants in a hot, boring place for an indefinite period.

Two days after General Williams made his prediction, there was a peaceful protest in the camps. Army troops contained the disturbance without much difficulty, but it was a harbinger of things to come.⁶⁷ On 1 August, there was a more threatening disturbance during which migrants brandished, but did not use, a variety of homemade weapons. According to intelligence officers, Haitians leaders, particularly Jean-Claude Petit, were organizing the migrants and focusing their efforts in Camps 1 and 3. General Williams noted the “camps [are] clean, but political activists are intimidating [the] rest of the population.”⁶⁸

Pressures came to a head on the morning of 13 August when several camps “came out of the wire” in a near riot. More than 100 of the migrants who escaped dove into the bay next to Camp McCalla and began to swim to the leeward side of the base thinking they were swimming to Cuba, from which they might have a better chance of making it to the United States. The barracks reacted by deploying to quell the disturbance. Marines,

fully camouflaged and heavily armed with bayonets fixed on their rifles, lined the leeward shore along the fence that separated the base from Cuba. The sight of the barracks Marines terrified the unfortunate migrant swimmers, most of whom turned around and started to swim back to Camp McCalla, which was no small feat considering the camp was a mile away and they were swimming against the current. As they came ashore, security forces from both the JTF and the base put plastic flexicuffs on the wrists of the escapees and returned them to custody. The incident was over by 1300. General Williams was satisfied with the performance of his troops, noting they had done “a fantastic job of keeping their cool under tough circumstances.” But the apparent overreaction by the base and the barracks during the incident lead the general to seek to “clarify [the] boundary between [the] base and [the] JTF.”⁶⁹

The camps were quiet the following day, but there was a challenge from another quarter. The



DVIC DM-ST-94-02618

Loaded with more than 2,600 Cuban migrants picked up at sea in the waters between Cuba and the Florida Keys, the dock landing ship USS Whidbey Island (LSD 41) heads for the camps at Guantanamo Bay.

Norfolk-based U.S. Atlantic Command asked General Williams to explain what caused the unrest. He wrote a somewhat wry unofficial answer in his diary, which states the unrest was “the proximate result of putting 15,000 people on a hot runway in Cuba for two months in the summer.”⁷⁰ Three days later, Williams and his staff faced yet another challenge as the first hurricane of the year began to form in the Atlantic. Although hurricanes generally bypassed Guantanamo, the potential danger was real, and many staff officers turned their attention to contingency planning for bad weather. If the hurricane struck the base, the JTF could be faced with a very bad situation. The plan, in a nutshell, was to find hardened shelters for as many migrants as possible, and to evacuate the rest, assuming that Atlantic Command could surge enough shipping and aircraft to Cuba to do the job in time. General Williams reflected it was “a good plan, but there [was] ... no way to make it anything but ugly.”⁷¹

Fortunately, the weather did not create a significant problem. However, a storm, albeit a figurative storm, did strike the base. It was as though the JTF was on a training exercise and the controllers were pushing to see how well the force could perform. Just when it seemed the JTF was gaining on the challenge posed by the Haitian migrants, there loomed the mind-numbing specter of thousands of Cuban migrants.

Stressing the System with Cuban Migrants

Partly in response to a degree of unrest at home, and partly to rid himself of malcontents, Cuban President Fidel Castro decided in mid-August not to detain would-be Cuban migrants determined to float to Florida. Accompanying his decision was a press campaign stating the United States was encouraging illegal immigration by enforcing the trade embargo and allowing all arrivals to stay, whether they came with a visitor's visa on a chartered airplane or simply waded ashore in the Florida Keys. This might not have been the Immigration and Naturalization Service's description of its policy, but it did reflect reality: few Cuban migrants had ever been turned away. But, as if to spite Castro, the Clinton administration changed that policy. Janet Reno, the Attorney General, broadcast a message to the people of Cuba who were contemplating migration, saying, “You will not be processed—not be processed—for admission to the United States.” She added, in



DVIC DN-ST-98-00715

While the Cuban migrants were enroute to Guantanamo, Marines worked hard to set up tents to house them. The JTF also erected tents to house the personnel who would care for the Cuban migrants once they arrived.

a phrase that likely gave General Williams pause, "You are going to Guantanamo."⁷² *

No one in Cuba seemed to believe the message at first, and a cottage industry sprouted on Cuba's north shore: non-recreational rafting. The refugees assembled a bizarre assortment of rafts, often by lashing together inner tubes, lumber, and a wide variety of other materials to create moderately seaworthy products. Some of the rafts had sails; recycled motors powered others. Many had nothing but makeshift paddles. Asked by an American reporter about his intentions, a Cuban migrant on the beach pointed to his raft and said,

* More than one commentator noted the inconsistency between U.S. policy on Haitian migrants (who were usually encouraged to return home) and Cuban migrants (almost all of whom were welcome to stay in Florida once they arrived). In this case, however, the Clinton administration wanted to control the flow of Cuban migrants to prevent a recurrence of the so-called Mariel Boatlift of 1980, when Castro had allowed a large number of undesirables to leave Cuba and make their way to Florida. See, for example, J. A. Pitts, "Migrants Resettlement Operations" (Miami: SouthCom Unpublished Manuscript, Supplement Nr. 2 to U.S. SouthCom History, 31Jan98).

"Of course, I would rather go in an airplane, but this is the way Cubans get to the United States."⁷³ That is how thousands of migrants set sail from Cuba's north coast. Most would be intercepted at sea by the Coast Guard and the Navy and taken to Guantanamo, perhaps not the last place on earth they wanted to go, but probably a close contender for that distinction.**

Told to prepare for up to 10,000 Cuban

** It did not take long for the JTF to learn just how much the Cubans did not want to go to Guantanamo. Rescued by the frigate USS *Clark* (FFG 11) in late August, some 500 Cubans told the crew they would resist, by force if necessary, landing in Cuba. LtCol Douglas C. Redlich tasked LtCol John R. Allen's battalion, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, with defusing the situation. LtCol Allen planned a show of force on the pier and sent one of his officers, Capt William R. Costantini, along with Chaplain Joseph R. Lamonde of Grand Turk fame, in a Boston whaler out to meet the ship and report on the situation. Once on board the *Clark*, Lamonde changed into his cassock and clambered into the upper works of the ship, literally appearing to the migrants from on high in his flowing black robe. The tactic worked. The migrants shifted from anger to respect and listened to the priest who, through his presence of mind and grace under pressure, averted what might have been an ugly fight. (Allen Memorandum)



DVIC DN-ST-97-01840

More than 600 Cubans on board the Guided Missile Cruiser USS Vicksburg (CG 69) arrive at Guantanamo Bay on 23 August 1994. They were the first to arrive after the U.S. Navy assumed the responsibility of transporting Cubans from the U.S. Coast Guard.

migrants, General Williams rapidly redeployed his forces, deciding in short order that Camp McCalla would house the Haitian migrants, who would come under control of the Army component of the JTF. Lieutenant Colonel Redlich's Marines, who had been preparing the overflow site on nearby Grand Turk Island, would care for Cuban migrants in and around the inhospitable Camp Bulkeley a few miles away. The Marines soon became the core of Joint Task Group Bulkeley with the same commander and the same mission and reinforcements from other Services.

General Williams' policy was to keep the Haitians and the Cubans apart while making every effort to treat the two groups equally.* To meet the demands of the two-pronged mission,

* Although Camps McCalla and Bulkeley were miles apart, the Cubans' presence did not escape the Haitians' notice. Before long, the Haitians were protesting that Cubans were receiving better treatment. Gen Williams' response was to bus Haitian representatives to the Cuban camps and let them see for themselves that the newcomers were, in fact, worse off, living in dusty camps without plumbing, and eating MREs (meals ready to eat—the latter day combat meals). (Williams intvw)



DVIC DN-ST-98-00730

LCpl Charles Criscione from Company F, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, passes out bottled water to Cuban migrants waiting for Deployable Mass Population Identification and Tracking Systems bracelets.

the joint task force would have to grow dramatically. General Williams' initial estimate, which proved to be conservative, called for the addition of about 3,800 military personnel. Those already on board would have to pull double duty until reinforcements arrived. After finishing their regular jobs, they put up tents and surrounded them with concertina wire to create camps. When the Cubans began to arrive, virtually everyone, including new arrivals and old hands, worked around the clock to unload the ships and keep pace with the flow.

The first loads of migrants came ashore at 0300 on 22 August. Their numbers exceeded 9,000 by 25 August and grew to 14,000 by 27 August. Even when the flow slackened on succeeding days, the JTF continued to build an infrastructure for a possible total of 45,000 and then 60,000, a staggering

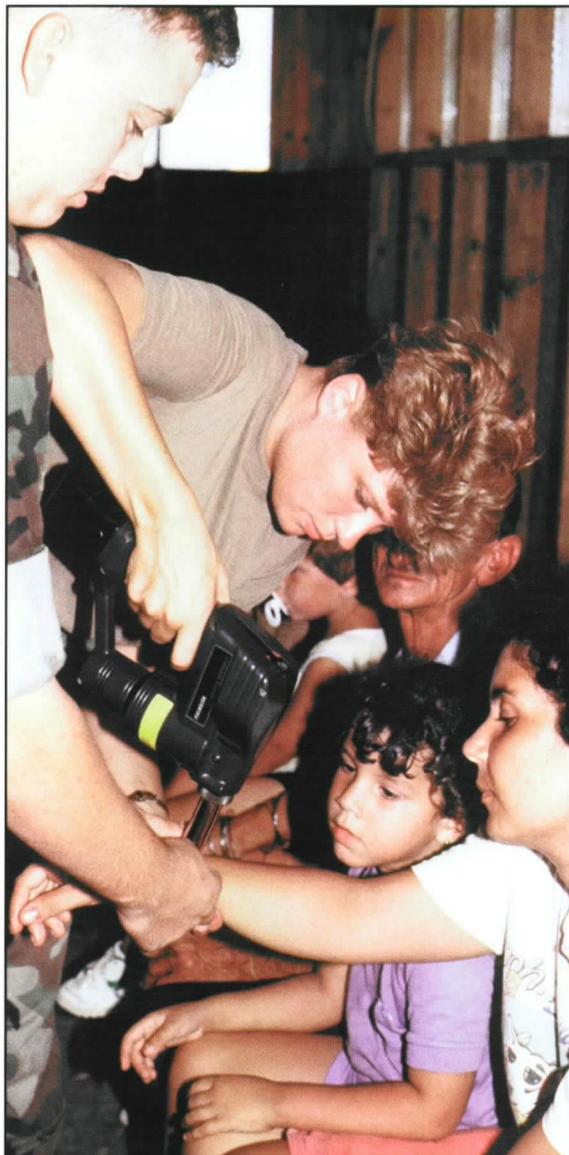
new number put into play by Atlantic Command. To make room for the migrants and generally reduce the strain on the resources at hand, Norfolk ordered the evacuation of non-essential Guantanamo base civilians and dependents by the end of the month.⁷⁴

The arrival of large numbers of Cubans changed the security equation and added some troublesome new questions. Was there now both an internal and an external threat? Did the Cuban government somehow intend to coordinate aggression from the fence line by instigating a breakout from one or more of the camps? For the newly arrived commander of the barracks, Colonel John M. Himes, this was a definite possibility, and he requested reinforcements to enable him to fight effectively on two fronts: to hold the fence line and to protect the base's vital installa-

tions from rampaging migrants. To hold the fence line, Colonel Himes deployed his troops forward, shifting the emphasis from manning guard towers to a kind of mobile defense with active patrolling. The shift in tactics would, Colonel Himes thought, make it easier to cope with the influx of Cubans over the land border while minimizing the dangers to migrants who tried to make their way to freedom through the Cuban and American minefields along the fence line. Accordingly, most barracks Marines moved to the field for a workweek under austere, near-wartime conditions. If they were able to return to the barracks on the weekend, they would spend the time on standby in the event migrants took advantage of a slightly relaxed routine on Saturday or Sunday.⁷⁵

The barracks did not simply wait for the worst-case scenario to occur, but exercised for the contingency. On 10 and 17 August, Colonel Himes conducted tactical exercises with troops of the barracks' migrant defense operations plan, finalized in late July. The exercises, one for Camp McCalla and another for Camp Bulkeley, were realistic, though somewhat pessimistic in assumptions. The plans assumed JTF security forces had been unable to contain hordes of migrants, some of whom were preparing to set fire to General Williams' headquarters while the remainder were streaming toward the heart of the base. The objective was to cut migrants off before they reached any vital installations. Every Marine rehearsed until he knew his role by heart, as well as the all-important rules of engagement.⁷⁶

General Williams, meanwhile, saw things differently. While the Marine barracks was on a near-wartime footing, JTF 160 was on a humanitarian mission in an ambiguous situation with ill-defined threats. For General Williams, the security missions of the barracks Marines and the JTF were distinct, and it concerned him to hear Colonel Himes say his troops were authorized to use deadly force. The general wanted to ensure everyone understood the authorization was tied strictly to the defense of certain vital installations on base, not to containing any disturbance by migrants that might pose a threat to the base later on. He did not want anyone to use excessive force against the migrants, and thereby create an international incident. Nor did he see a heightened external threat. Rather, the general continued to focus on the kind of internal disturbances he (and Generals Walls before him) had already faced, and he rejected the suggestion the JTF should assume responsibility for the security of



DVIC DN-ST-98-00731

LCpl Sabata Mixon and SrA Jennifer Brown use a rivet gun to attach an identification and tracking bravelet to a Cuban child. Young or old, all Cuban migrants received bracelets.

the base and of the camps.⁷⁷ * Although the base, the barracks, and the JTF would continue to exchange liaison officers and discuss contingency plans, General Williams intended to rely primarily on JTF assets for security. This meant its Army

* Gen Williams outranked the base commander, a Navy captain who also commanded the JTF's small Naval Force (NavFot), which was made up largely of base personnel. In that capacity, he reported directly to the general. Playing the two roles was, at times, difficult for the captain because the base's long-term interests often clashed with those of the JTF, which was a short-term but very demanding tenant capable of ruining a lot of real estate.

and Marine components, soon to be augmented by the rest of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, under Colonel Allen, which had performed so well in Jamaica and would become the core of Joint Task Group Bulkeley's external security element. It also meant the general did not intend to rely on guns and wire alone. As he commented on 27 August, "I can lower frustrations by 50 percent if I can get showers and adequate water for the people."⁷⁸

Most of Lieutenant Colonel Allen's battalion had spent the intervening weeks back at Camp Lejeune. Allen and his staff, especially his operations officer, Major John E. Stone, knew they might have to re-deploy to the Caribbean for another migrant operation. With that prospect looming, they used the time at Camp Lejeune to evaluate the lessons learned on the *Comfort* off Jamaica and to study the history of an uprising at a U.S. Army prisoner of war camp that held Chinese soldiers during the Korean War. Major Stone concluded that the rules of engagement for civil disturbances had to be "ironclad." Like the barracks Marines, everyone in 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, had to know how much force could be used and when to use it. Since it was likely the JTF would deploy the battalion over a wide area, the small unit leaders needed to be comfortable applying the rules of engagement and making decisions on their own.⁷⁹

Within hours of its return to Guantanamo on 26 and 27 August, the battalion faced the first in a long series of challenges. Men of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, waited on the pier to escort Cuban migrants to the rifle range, an overflow camp north of Camp Bulkeley that was literally built around them overnight. This became Camp Mike. Under the command of First Lieutenant Thomas M. Mirande, the Marines did a superb job not only of building the camp in the physical sense, but of making it into a working community. In the days to come, the payoff for Lieutenant Mirande's good work at Camp Mike would be realized, as it became one of the few camps where there were no uprisings.⁸⁰

Apart from Camp Mike and Camp Bulkeley proper, Joint Task Group Bulkeley built, maintained, and ran two other camps. One of the camps, the Radio Range, was located nearby along the coast and comprised a long-range radio antenna farm. The other camp was a few miles north at the golf course.

By now the process was becoming routine for General Williams' troops. They erected concertina

wire around the individual camps, each holding 2,000 to 3,000 migrants living in general-purpose tents, and built cyclone fences around groups of camps. Small trailers with water tanks, known as water buffaloes, and portable toilets were brought in while the camps waited for better plumbing. The evolution was successful in large part because the migrants organized themselves and pitched in to help. But it was still difficult to overcome the inherent limitations of the place.⁸¹ When General Williams inspected the Radio Range, he found the camps were built on "two to three feet of dust" and commented the Cubans at the golf course were in "the least harsh place."⁸²

General Williams also noted the presence of a number of troublemakers among the migrants, including what he called the "gang bubbas," a hardcore criminal element that traveled with the van of the migrants, perhaps by Cuban government design. According to one estimate, this lot made up five percent of the migrant population. Immigration and Naturalization Service agents, who watched them disembark, already knew some of them. A few were on first name terms with the agents from previous encounters such as the Mariel Boatlift incident when Castro emptied mental hospitals and prisons in a challenge to the President James E. Carter, Jr., administration more than a decade earlier. Others were recognizable from their tattoos; one of the more interesting JTF documents was a field guide to deciphering the meaning of Cuban tattoos. Immigration officers recommended those with certain tattoos be identified and segregated. The JTF agreed and instituted a requirement for all young males to strip to the waist for a tattoo check. If tattooed, they were segregated from the rest of the population.⁸³ In the days to come, General Williams maintained the policy of trying to separate the good guys from the bad guys, especially since many of the bad guys were very assertive and tried to take over some of the camps. It was a policy that made eminent sense.⁸⁴

By the beginning of September, there were some 20,000 Cubans from all walks of life—from white-collar professionals to blue-collar workers to criminals—in the Marine area of operations at Guantanamo.⁸⁵ The JTF met the demand for food and water most of the time, but in Major Stone's words, "it was a logistical nightmare."⁸⁶ When the JTF was unable to keep everyone fed and watered, the Cubans reacted. There might be a few placards, some chanting, and threats to property or personnel. In response, the Marines would

deploy a reaction force and contain the demonstration by talking and working with the migrants. On 6 September, for example, a crowd of 500 Cubans started throwing rocks at soldiers in one of the camps and then vandalized a nearby vehi-

cle. The arrival of a reaction team from the external security force quickly stabilized the situation. It was a generally successful approach as long as the Cubans believed their patience would eventually earn them passage to Florida.⁸⁷