

Chapter 3

Crisis

Out of the Wire at Guantanamo

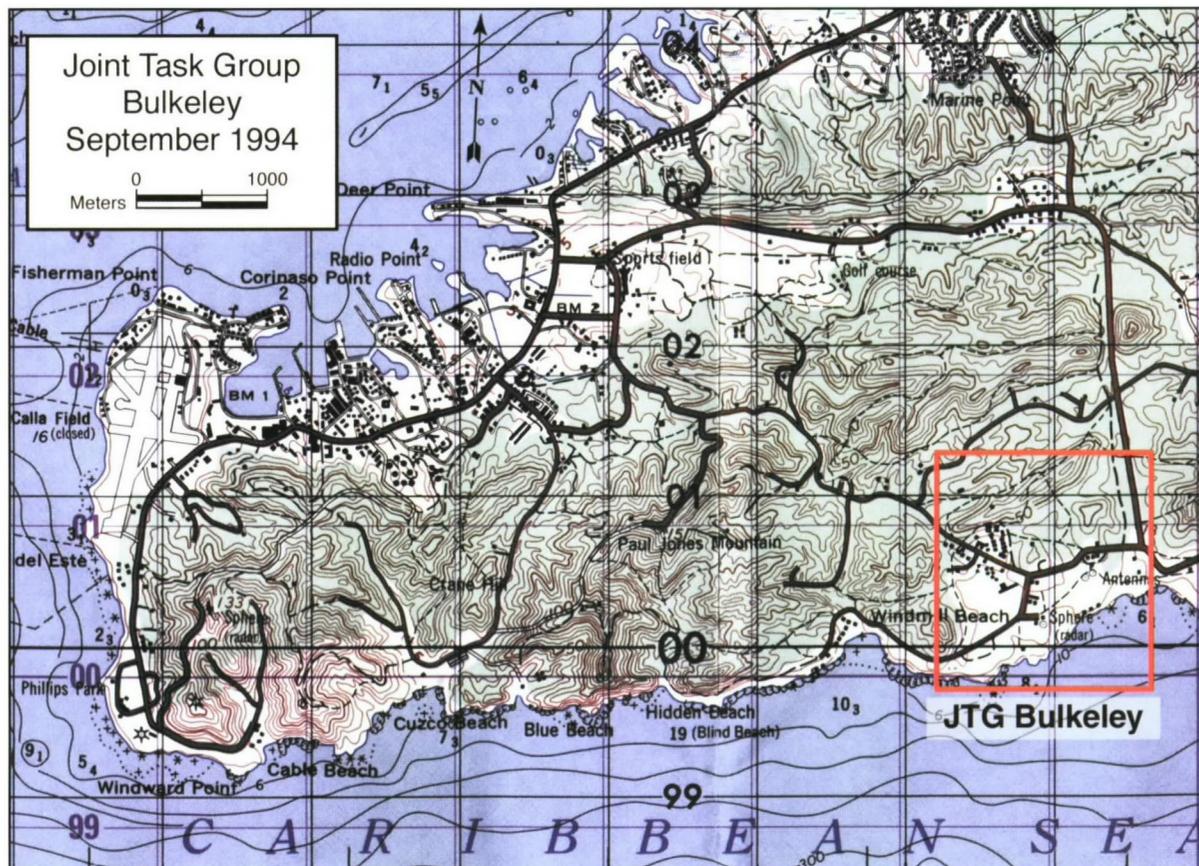
Joint Task Force 160 devoted significant resources not only to containing disturbances, but also to predicting and preventing them. Military intelligence specialists from all Services spent long hours every day inside the camps, typically working in two-man teams that included at least one linguist. They had specific requirements, which usually centered on force protection—was anyone planning a demonstration, a breakout, or a violent act of any kind? Information collection methods were straightforward. Typically, the teams would approach one of the camp leaders and engage him in conversation, ask questions and then follow up on any leads. The migrants were cooperative most of the time, and the information they shared went into reports to JTF headquarters where analysts pored over the information and presented conclusions to the staff. This process helped minimize disturbances. In one case, the intelligence specialists found indications a group of migrants, upset over an impending move from one camp to another, planned to seize members of the JTF and hold them hostage. With this information in hand, the JTF made the easy decision to increase security for the move, which, in the end, occurred without incident.¹

The intelligence specialists, along with the infantrymen or military policemen (MPs) who patrolled the camps, also uncovered evidence of less dramatic problems. For example, migrants often pointed out the troublemakers among them, such as those who were making weapons or planning crimes. Weapons included gaffs, crossbows, and shanks (primitive knives). Some of the weapons had relatively innocent purposes. The crossbows, for example, were designed to hunt banana rats, a small animal that looked like an opossum but tasted like chicken and was a delicacy for the Cubans. Other weapons were intended to harm members of the JTF or other migrants.

Some migrant women, fearful of being raped, carried shanks in their brassieres. Once again voicing his concern about criminal migrants, the commander of JTF 160, Brigadier General Michael J. Williams, commented in his diary on 7 September: “Lots of crime in the Cuban camps, even in the



Photo courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen
The Cuban migrant camps were situated in the southeastern corner of the Guantanamo Bay naval base. The road out of the camp leads to Mainside, a few miles to the northwest through uninviting scrub brush hills. To the south are steep cliffs dropping off into the sea, and not far to the east is the boundary with Cuba.



family camp. We need to work harder to get the bad guys out of the camps and into detention.”² *

Another option intended to relieve tensions at the camp was to move some of the migrants out of Guantanamo to other safe havens. This policy, never clearly defined by the Clinton administration, was even murkier to the migrants. Nevertheless, a fair number of migrants volunteered to go to safe havens in Panama and elsewhere, apparently on the assumption that some movement, especially off the island, was better than none. The process did not move swiftly at first, but it was underway by 6 September.³

Meanwhile, the JTF was facing a water crisis. Despite the delivery of thousands of tons of bottled water, an ever-expanding capacity for producing drinking water by reverse osmosis and the Navy base’s own impressive efforts, demand for potable water continued to outpace supply as more Cubans poured in to the base. In the tropical heat of mid-summer, which in Guantanamo

* A related issue was how to treat mentally unstable and potentially dangerous migrants who, in the end, were sedated and kept apart from the general population. See BGen Williams intvw, 19Aug94 (Office of the Command Historian, USACom, Norfolk, Virginia).

tended to be a dry heat, the lack of water created a figurative tinderbox waiting for a match.

Washington provided the flame when the administration reaffirmed the safe haven policy, stating the American government would continue to offer migrants a safe haven from political and economic persecution but would not allow them to enter the United States. Those who did not like the policy were free to return home to Cuba or Haiti.⁴

General Williams knew the announcement meant trouble. Apart from the policy on repatriation, there was nothing new. All the migrants had heard it before, but most were unwilling to believe it and continued to nourish the hope the administration would make some kind of exception for them. JTF officers believed that Radio Marti, a Florida-based radio station controlled by Cuban exiles that operated with the support and approval of the U.S. Government, made a bad situation worse by hammering the message home in excited terms.⁵

Some of the migrants apparently concluded the U.S. and Cuban Governments had agreed on a policy of forcible repatriation. They were correct only in that the two governments were working

on an agreement whereby the Cubans would stop the migrants from setting out to sea while the U.S. would realign its immigration procedures.⁶

While the first disturbances were more about water, the safe haven policy soon became the umbrella under which all discontentments merged. On 9 September, this discontentment erupted on several fronts and presented the JTF with a rapid-fire series of challenges. First, migrants being held at Magazine Number 121, an obsolete ammunition bunker complex, commandeered a water buffalo and used it as a battering ram to knock down the surrounding fence. The quick reaction force from 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, responded and contained the disturbance without force.⁷ Two more breakouts followed in short order. The first involved 120 migrants at the golf course and the other 200 migrants at Camp Bulkeley. In both incidents, Marines were able to persuade migrants to return to their camps. A short time later, 500 migrants at the Radio Range breached the wire with picnic tables and headed toward nearby Camp Bulkeley. They began throwing rocks at members of the JTF, who tried to restrain them, and the quick

reaction force deployed once again and blocked the way to Camp Bulkeley. Chaplains then moved in and succeeded in calming the migrants.⁸

It had been a day of relatively small incidents strung one after another. For individual Marines and the command staff, the events of the day had been tiring but manageable. The next day, 10 September, would play out to be a much more challenging time. Marines on the front lines and their commanders were about to be tested for stamina, the ability to manage potentially explosive situations and their personal willingness to enter the fray. If mismanaged, the incidents of 10 September could have resulted in death or injury, led to a crisis between Cuba and the United States, and done significant damage to a commander's career. It was one of those days when senior officers earned their "extra pay."

The USS *Whidbey Island* (LSD 41), known to many from its recent assist at Grand Turk, steamed into port with approximately 2,500 migrants on board, but the migrants could not be unloaded. The JTF was too busy reacting to serious disturbances. The first was on the golf course, which was tactically controlled in large part by



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An aerial view of the golf course camps looking toward Mainside and the heart of the base. Chapel Hill is at the upper right close to the bay. The hills separating the Bulkeley/Radio Range area from the golf course and Mainside are clearly visible on the left.

Army units under Joint Task Group Bulkeley. That there was a serious disturbance on the golf course came as something of a surprise since the family camps in that area were typically more stable and quiet, especially compared to the camps for single males. The location of the golf course also made this disturbance more ominous since it was much closer to Mainside than Camp Bulkeley, which was located a few miles south on the other side of uninviting, cactus-covered hills.

The disturbance began in the early afternoon around 1300 when 2,000 to 3,000 migrants gathered at the wire and breached the outer ring of concertina. Word of the breach spread quickly, and within minutes, Lieutenant Colonel Douglas C. Redlich, in his capacity as commander of Joint Task Group Bulkeley, was at the site unhappily watching the Cubans stream out of the camp. One of his officers, Captain Franz J. Gayl, the officer who had chronicled the operation on Grand Turk, characterized his attitude as "doggone it." Captain Gayl also was struck by the migrants' purposefulness. It was almost as if the mob's leaders had carefully planned the outing. They were heading directly for the main area of the base and there was no milling around or confusion.⁹

Lieutenant Colonel Redlich concluded the migrants were determined to be heard. He was willing to listen to migrant demands, but he preferred it happen within the confines of a camp. He quickly decided to halt the flow of migrants from the golf course and ordered the Army military police units to seal the breach. The result was a short, unpleasant confrontation with migrants, who wanted to leave the camp. But the thin line of MPs held and migrants on the wrong side of the fence eventually returned to their tents.¹⁰ That still left some 3,000 migrants outside the fence, and they continued toward Mainside and a battalion of waiting Army troops. But that unit was unable to halt the flow and the migrants went through and around their formation.¹¹

By then, Colonel John M. Himes, the barracks commander, was standing on top of John Paul Jones Hill, the high ground that overlooked the golf course and allowed the colonel to monitor all radio traffic on the base. He had seen the Cubans streaming out of their camps and decided to "react the barracks Marines," which meant to recall his companies from the fence line separating the base from Cuba and deploy them against the migrants. Mindful of his mission to protect the vital installations of the base, Colonel Himes ordered his troops to set up positions to channel

the migrants in a safe direction away from Mainside.¹²

Lieutenant Colonel John R. Allen, in command of most of Redlich's external security forces from 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, had a similar experience. He was reconnoitering the high ground between Camp Bulkeley and the golf course when he spotted the dust cloud raised by the escaping Cubans. He then moved close enough to see the migrants breaking down the fence and streaming out of the camps. His action was to call the local Army battalion commander on the radio for help, but that officer had already committed his reserves and was about to be overrun. Allen then called Redlich and General Williams and told them he would use his troops to help cordon off the area and provide a reserve.¹³ *

In the meantime, the commander of Rifle Security Company Windward, Captain Neal F. Pugliese, together with two junior officers and about 100 Marines, had deployed around the McDonald's, a landmark located on Sherman Avenue, a main artery which led to the Mainside area and the Navy base headquarters. One of the Marines in that force recalled the approaching mob looking like the front view of a marathon starting line. The Marines were surprised to see base civilians and dependents going about their normal business as if it were just another day in small-town America. Captain Pugliese put his troops on line in riot formation and began to advance, quickly closing the distance between the two groups. Some of the Cubans were almost jogging, with the more vocal migrants egging the crowd toward the Marines in riot gear. Many of the Marines from the fence line still wore camouflage face paint, and all of them were carrying M16 rifles with fixed bayonets, though magazines had not been locked in the weapons. They had augmented their defenses with "Dragon's Teeth" and tetrahedrons, slightly more forbidding versions of the cones that road crews use to channel traffic on construction sites. One of the platoon commanders, First Lieutenant Robert P. Salasko, worried that one or more of the Marines might lose his nerve; the odds were, after all, about 30 to 1. He soon discovered his worry was misplaced. All of the Marines were eager to move forward. When the officers ordered the riot step, the

* The internal security forces were responsible for what happened within any particular camp, while the external security forces were responsible for what happened outside the confines of the camps.



Photo courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen

Marines protect their installation from Cuban migrants at the Radio Range in mid-September. Here, a reaction force blocks an exit.

Marines “trooped and stomped” towards the migrants with energy and determination.¹⁴

There was some pushing, shoving, and shouting when the leading edge of the mob hit the Marine line. Using tactics they had learned and rehearsed, Marines identified the crowd's leaders and dispatched snatch teams to neutralize them, which meant pulling them from the crowd, binding their wrists with plastic flexicuffs, and depositing them on the ground. The Marines continued to move forward, sometimes stepping over and around the cuffed troublemakers. The migrants responded with a barrage of rocks and more pushing and shoving. A migrant then grabbed a Marine's rifle. True to his training, the Marine reacted by giving the migrant a butt stroke, followed by a downward slash. With stab wounds to the upper arm and the flesh outside the rib cage, the migrant fell bleeding to the ground.¹⁵

The sight of blood had an immediate impact. Some of the migrants began running from the Marine “white sleeves,” so called because the Marines rolled the sleeves of their camouflage utilities out, showing lighter colored material, while the Army did the reverse. Other migrants

turned passive. Medical personnel stepped in to evacuate the injured migrant to the naval hospital, where he made a complete recovery from his wounds.¹⁶ But a number of migrants continued to advance, racing for a small bridge across an intermittent creek to the north, which led to the patch of high ground known as Chapel Hill. There was more pushing and shoving, and the Marines bayoneted two more aggressive migrants, inflicting superficial wounds. The Marines cuffed at least one of them hand and foot and left him, subdued, on the ground. The migrants who were still standing reacted by launching another barrage of rocks. The Marines again snatched and cuffed the apparent ringleaders. The migrants finally admitted defeat, shouting, “*No mas*, white sleeves! No more!” and the violence ebbed.¹⁷

Captain Pugliese decided to let the situation cool and ordered the Marines to fall back and allow the migrants to continue moving laterally toward Chapel Hill. Hundreds of migrants took the opportunity and climbed up the hill to the church on top. Somewhat isolated by dense brush and water, this was not key terrain. Colonel Himes later remembered hoping that letting the

migrants occupy "holy ground" would calm them.¹⁸

Realizing they were being isolated but unwilling to give up, a large group of male migrants spotted a gap in the Marine encirclement and tried to break out in the direction of Camp McCalla. A particularly alert squad from Company G, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, standing a few hundred yards away, watched and analyzed the Cubans' movements and saw where they could cut them off on a small incline. On their own initiative, in 100 degree heat, the heavily laden Marines double-timed to the top of the slope, arriving there seconds before the migrants. There was a violent hand-to-hand struggle with both sides trading blows and suffering minor injuries. But the Marines quickly achieved violence supremacy and forced the Cubans to fall back.¹⁹

After closing the break in the fence, Lieutenant Colonel Redlich had returned to his humvee and simply watched the progress of the crowd. He saw the migrants settle around the church, gathering in a huge semicircle in the garden in front of a concrete patio attached to the building. The crowd started to chant slogans. Redlich took a chance and stepped up onto the patio to address the crowd. The Cubans apparently understood he was not the commanding general, but that he had something to do with day-to-day discipline. They would not let him speak, greeting him instead with jeers and making it clear they wanted to hear from the commanding general.²⁰

Redlich then drove to JTF headquarters at Camp McCalla to get General Williams, who readily agreed to go to the hill occupied by the migrants. After the two officers devised a strategy for dealing with the crisis, General Williams said he really had to talk to the migrants. It was now between 1600 and 1700.²¹

The Cubans cheered when the general arrived and walked briskly to the patio, wearing his everyday utility uniform, unarmed and escorted only by Lieutenant Colonel Redlich, Captain Gayl, his driver, and JTF 160 Sergeant Major Douglas E. Berry (who was still sergeant major of the 2d Force Service Support Group at Camp Lejeune and had been with General Walls three years earlier when that officer had faced rioting Haitian migrants). While a number of migrants waved homemade banners demanding visas, liberty and family reunification, migrants in the front ranks called for silence. An interpreter conveyed the migrants' demands to General Williams, which included: immediate U.S. press coverage of their

plight; immediate messages to Washington conveying their demands; clarification of the rumor, apparently stemming from the Radio Marti broadcast, that the JTF would forcibly repatriate migrants to Cuba; representation by Cuban-American lawyers; and permission to remain on Chapel Hill until Washington responded to their demands for expedited immigration processing.²²

What General Williams told the migrants in reply was the truth, without embellishment. The first promise was easy. He would provide Washington with full information about the volatile situation at the camp. Speaking through an interpreter, he told the migrants he would convey their message to the policy-makers and make sure they were heard. Next, he promised that within two days the migrants would be able to meet face-to-face with the media, a statement consistent with his "full and open disclosure" media policy. William made a point of reminding the Cubans he was a military man and his job was to follow orders, not make policy. He understood their plight. In a way he and his troops were prisoners of the same situation. They had the same kind of living quarters as the migrants—perhaps somewhat better, but not much so—and they would be there as long as the migrants.²³

This message, conveyed in General Williams' low-key, even-handed style, brought the house down. There were a few migrants who looked very hostile and seemed intent on driving him from the podium. They made Captain Gayl, who was a large, muscular officer, very nervous, and he made sure he stayed between them and the general. But most of the Cubans were wildly enthusiastic, cheering and applauding Williams as if he had promised deliverance instead of telling them there was only so much he could do for them. Seeing their reaction, General Williams decided to capitalize on the situation and invited the migrants to walk back to the camp with him.²⁴

Literally thousands agreed, and in the gathering twilight, the general led his unusual flock off the hill and back to the golf course roughly one mile away. During the walk, friendly migrants moved close to the general to touch him, pat him on the back and shake his hand, shouting "*Viva el General!*" and "You are our General." A few disapproving Cubans picked up rocks and golf balls along the route and appeared inclined to throw them at the Marines. This situation worried one young Marine platoon commander to the point of ordering his troops to intervene, but General Williams signaled the lieutenant to hold his posi-

tion and casually picked up one of the balls himself, putting it in his pocket. His action, and the admonitions of fellow migrants, probably kept the troublemakers from following through with plans to throw the objects.²⁵

Marines from 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, shadowed the column of migrants on both sides. Lieutenant Colonel Redlich, who walked alongside General Williams, ordered the Marines to stow their bayonets, invert their rifles and stay a reasonable distance from the crowd. Captain Gayl concluded: "the scene resembled a 1960s-era civil rights march more than anything else."²⁶

Once in sight of the camp, General Williams and his tiny staff mounted a small knoll and invited the column to form a circle around him. He thanked the migrants for returning peacefully to the camp with him and repeated the promises he had made on Chapel Hill. He and Redlich then led the migrants through the front gate, and after receiving several dozen more handshakes, they left the area.²⁷

For hours after General Williams' departure, migrants continued to straggle into the camp. Unfortunately, many appeared to be carrying cloth satchels filled with rocks. A few hundred migrants stayed on Chapel Hill, staging a kind of sit down protest. Williams decided simply to leave them where they were and build a camp around them. His troops strung wire around the bottom of the hill while a group of angry troublemakers shouted obscenities at them. Although security officers took note of their identities, the JTF took no action against the sit down strike. Since the general gave the order not to feed the migrants on Chapel Hill until they returned to their camps, the demonstration fizzled to an end when hunger overcame anger.²⁸

But this was far from the end of the JTF's troubles. Things had not been quiet in the Camp Bulkeley/Radio Range area during the golf course crisis. Some 5,000 migrants in those camps had decided they were tired of confinement and threw picnic tables across the wire or simply demolished fence posts and gates and walked out of their camps. There was little violence, although there was some looting of food and equipment. Some of the hotheads appeared to be preparing for the inevitable confrontation with the security forces by arming themselves with steel rebar clubs and rocks and telling liaison officers they were ready to fight and die for their freedom. As the sun set on the area, Captain Gayl remembered, "Radio Range Road closely resembled

Havana's version of the Boardwalk" as thousands of migrants strolled outside the wire. Tongue in cheek, he called it the "camps without walls" phase of the operation.²⁹

Given the disparity in numbers and the challenges at the other end of the base, there was little the JTF could do. Major John E. Stone, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines' operations officer, took 40 Marines and tried to impose a modicum of control on part of the area in the early evening. He remembers the eerie scene, backlit by searchlights, as he deployed his Marines across one of the roads in the area. Soon a sea of migrants, many shouting and talking excitedly in Spanish, washed in and around his position, wedging the

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Marines in a gap between two of the camps. His troops looked to him for guidance, and in his head, Major Stone quickly ran through everything he had learned in his years in the Marine Corps. Neither prepared to use deadly force to stop the migrants, nor willing to back down and leave the migrants with the impression the Marines could be intimidated, it was a quintessential "What now, Lieutenant?" moment.³⁰

During the tense standoff between the shouting migrants and the vastly outnumbered Marines, some of the migrants at the rear of the crowd found another way around the Marine position by simply proceeding behind one of the camps. Once the remaining migrants realized there was a way out, they quickly withdrew from the situation. The major was relieved his dilemma had resolved itself. At this point, he was quite willing to let the migrants walk off into the night.³¹

Lieutenant Colonel Redlich appealed for calm and order through the camp spokesmen.³² His security forces protected his command post as well as the air transportable hospital, which was sandwiched between migrant camps, and nearby Camp Quick, where Lieutenant Colonel Allen's Marines had pitched their tents. He had decided,

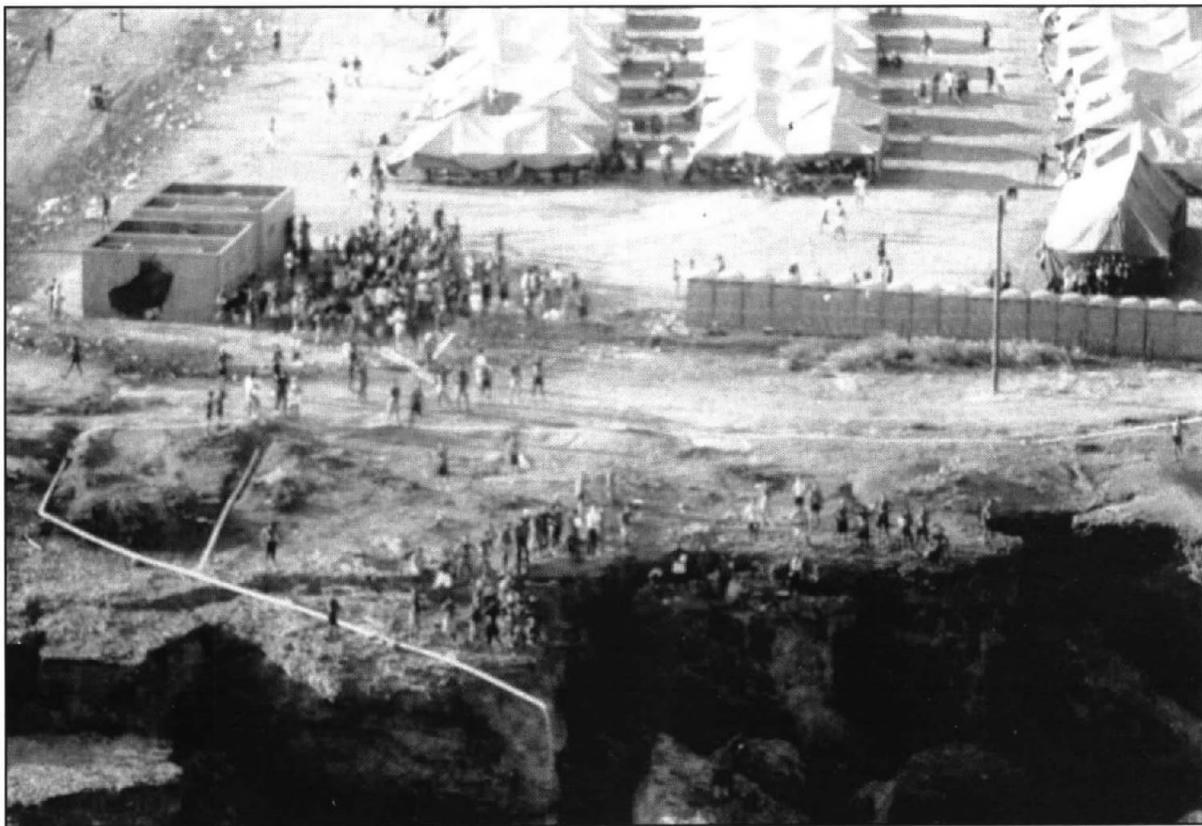


Photo courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen

The “camps without walls” phase of the operation: ignoring camp boundaries, Cuban migrants roam the Radio Range area at will.

wisely as it turned out, to place his command post in Camp Quick, which the Marines proceeded to protect with extensive wire obstacles and riflemen on the perimeter with loaded M16s tipped with bayonets. Other security forces maintained blocking positions between the Camp Bulkeley area and Mainside.³³

Then came 11 September, not a good day. At 0626, the JTF staff notified the barracks the golf course might erupt again and positioned forces in and around the Mainside areas to contain any renewed threats to base facilities. But nothing happened on that front. At 0815, a report came in of tension building at the chapel, but not much happened there either.³⁴ Then, less than two hours later, approximately 3,000 migrants with a spearhead of troublemakers and homemade banners left Camp Bulkeley through the remains of the camp’s west gate and headed north on Magazine Road toward the naval ammunition magazines. Initial reports indicated the migrants wanted to link up with their compatriots at the golf course, news that had an electrifying effect on the staff of the JTF who envisioned that scenario as their worst nightmare come true.³⁵

Word of the impending crisis spread quickly along radio networks and phone lines. Colonel Himes drove to the high ground between Camp Bulkeley and the golf course. From there he could see the migrants streaming toward him and he directed a platoon of his Marines under Captain Pugliese to cut them off. Since Pugliese and his Marines were a few miles away, they first had to find transportation. The captain decided to commandeer one of the refurbished school buses the base used for its transportation system. The bus driver, a Jamaican civilian, refused, telling the captain he had to make his scheduled run. Pugliese found a way to make it clear he would not take “no” for an answer, and the bus driver decided it would be best to do what the captain wanted.³⁶

A few minutes later, as the bus rounded a corner in the sandy hills dotted with cactus plants and abandoned ammunition bunkers, the Marines once again found themselves facing thousands of migrants heading their way. Captain Pugliese deployed his troops, who looked as fearsome as they had the day before with rifles and riot gear, across the road between two small hills and put out wire barriers on the flanks. Seeing the

Marines, the migrants shouted, "It's the white sleeves!" and slowed to a halt. They then sat down and said they would not move until their demands had been met.³⁷

A stalemate developed and lasted until Lieutenant Colonel Allen appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, along with Lieutenant Colonel Randy Garver, an Army MP officer who had been a corporal in the Marine Corps at Khe Sanh and "spoke the same language" as his Marine counterparts. Allen and Garver were alone without any troops since both of their battalions were still committed to containing the disturbances at the golf course. For some four hours in the hot sun, the pair of officers tried to persuade the migrants to return to their camps. In the end, they told the crowd, less politely, it was their choice: they could return to the camp on their own, or they could wait until the Marines forced them to return at gunpoint.³⁸ Colonel Himes had arrived at the same conclusion and ordered his troops to prepare to use tear gas. The barracks Marines had donned their gas masks at about the same time as General Williams arrived on the scene with a visiting member of the National Security Council, who was more than a little concerned about the repercussions and the safety of all U.S. personnel on the scene. Williams briefly addressed the migrants, but this time they did not respond.³⁹

The standoff continued as the hot day wore on. The Cubans did not move, but the Marines did not use any tear gas.⁴⁰ In the late afternoon, Major Stone led a platoon-size reaction force of Marines, mostly from Company E, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, and under the command of Captain William R. Costantini, in search of a terrain feature he could use to cut the Cuban column in two. The migrant column was now strung-out in segments between Camp Bulkeley and the platoon from the barracks along Magazine Road. Once again, the uninviting hills to the left and right of the road boxed the migrants into a narrow channel, making it difficult for them to leave the road and go around the Marines. Major Stone and Captain Costantini worried the migrants would sit down on the pavement, which would have made it difficult to resolve the situation in their favor. Not unlike Colonel Joshua L. Chamberlain of the 20th Maine when his ammunition ran out at Gettysburg and the only other options were surrender or retreat, Major Stone ordered Captain Costantini to fix bayonets and advance.⁴¹

Amazingly, the 40 or so Marines started to drive the crowd of thousands back toward the

beach. Troublemakers in the crowd reacted with a hail of rocks, but the Marines deployed their snatch teams, catching and cuffing more than a few of the rock-throwers before continuing their advance. At one point, it looked as though the retreating migrants might stampede and trample the migrants still coming out of the camps and heading toward the clash. Seeing this, the major directed Captain Costantini to slow the advance of his Marines. The men responded expertly to Costantini's commands. Easing the rate of advance allowed the migrants to retreat without panicking into the outer perimeter of the Radio Range complex of camps. Costantini's men literally slammed and locked the gate behind them. The Marines then turned and advanced in the direction of the migrants caught between them and the barracks Marines. Despite the enormous disparity in numbers, this was too much for most of the migrants, who quickly decided to return to their camps. The troublemakers spent the night in administrative segregation, separated from the general population.⁴²

As if to keep the JTF on its toes, in the late afternoon of 11 September, Haitian migrants at Camp McCalla staged a demonstration, which, thankfully, turned out to be a relatively minor affair.⁴³ But the day's work was still not done. Once again, an unexpected challenge arose for the weary Marines and their comrades in arms. When Lieutenant Colonel Allen returned to the command post at Camp Bulkeley, Lieutenant Colonel Redlich handed him a message warning of an imminent tropical storm. Instead of relaxing with a well-deserved hot meal, all the Marines of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, turned to preparing the camps for the storm. They lashed tents to the ground, cleared away loose debris, and did what they could to ready the camps for bad weather. Redlich and Allen asked the migrant leaders to forget their differences and work together in the common cause. Many of the Cubans complied with the request, but a significant few did not. When the troublemakers started to stone a detail from Company G, Allen ordered all his troops to return to the safety of Camp Quick and let the Cubans fend for themselves when the storm struck.⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the darkness and the confusion made it possible for migrants to loot the now-abandoned air transportable hospital, removing an assortment of equipment such as rebar, scalpels, syringes, and tent poles, all items with excellent weapon potential. It appeared there was

an armory tent where the Cubans were taking the material and honing their weapons. The storm, when it came during the night, was relatively mild, with winds not exceeding 30 miles per hour.⁴⁵

Back Behind Wire

Prospects were bleak when the Marines awoke on the morning of 12 September. Lieutenant Colonel Allen remembered feeling "very low" because the JTF had lost control of the situation the day before. But he soon told his operations officer he was determined to retake the camps and reestablish control. Allen discussed his plan with Lieutenant Colonel Redlich, who approved it and placed him in tactical command of all security forces at Camp Bulkeley, a force comprising five U.S. Army and Marine infantry units and four Army MP companies. Around 1000 a rapid planning process began for Operation Clean Sweep, which was to be launched at 1700.⁴⁶

In the meantime, another water shortage blossomed into a crisis. One of the causes of the shortage was migrant sabotage to the pipelines. The response was to shut off water to Camp Bulkeley until plumbers could repair the damage. This did not sit well with the migrants in the blistering heat, who thought the outage was retribution for two days of demonstrations. More than 800 migrants left their areas at Camp Bulkeley and gathered on the road to the Radio Range between the command post for the complex and Camp Quick. There they erected a blockade of concertina wire and camp cots. The migrants declared their intention to maintain the blockade until the JTF restored water to them.⁴⁷

The response was restrained. While a quick reaction force stood by inside the gate to Camp Quick, the JTF called for additional water trucks. But it would take hours for the trucks to arrive. Agitators, meanwhile, began to harangue the crowd, which swelled as time went on. A group of migrants decided to pass the time by assaulting Army MPs, who cuffed and detained two of the most violent and vocal migrants. The MPs sent one of the migrants immediately to the Magazine 121 detention area. For some reason, the other remained under guard behind the command post. A rumor he had been abused spread like a brushfire on a dry hillside. As a result, the mob attacked the small wooden house that stood in a clearing by itself. Mostly, the migrants threw rocks at the thin line of soldiers and Marines defending the



Photo courtesy of Col Douglas C. Redlich
LiCol Douglas C. Redlich (right), commander of Joint Task Group Bulkeley, with his executive officer, Maj Brian J. Vincent, stand on a hill overlooking the Cuban migrant camps. LiCol Redlich played a leading role in JTF 160, establishing the camp on Grand Turk Island, which was never used, and then participating in the operations to reestablish order when the Cuban migrants rioted in September 1994.

headquarters. In all, there was a lone platoon of Army MPs, along with the officers and noncommissioned officers of the staff for Camp Bulkeley.⁴⁸

Captain Gayl, who was assigned to the command post, was the right man in the wrong place when the violence began, caught literally between the command post and the Cubans along with one other officer. With one riot shield between them, the two tried to take shelter from the barrage of rocks, which quickly began to shatter the shield. The two officers dashed, one after the other, back to the command post, almost literally between the shower of rocks. Miraculously unhurt, they joined the defenders, who included Sergeant Major Royce S. Restivo. As the mob surged forward, sometimes striking the MPs' shields with their fists and bodies, Sergeant Major Restivo rotated between the MP positions outside the command post, filling gaps and motivating the defenders.⁴⁹ It was, to say the least, an exhilarating event.

At this point, the reaction force, Marines from Company G, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, arrived and waded into the crowd from the rear while migrants in front of the command post appeared ready to make a rock-throwing all-out charge using picnic tables as battering rams. One of the MPs took the initiative and counterattacked, driving his squat, modernistic humvee into the picnic tables and forcing the migrants back, if only

briefly. They reacted by turning their attention to vandalizing nearby vehicles. Two courageous members of the command post staff ran forward in a vain attempt to thwart their efforts, which led to a frenzied response by the migrants. A renewed—and greater—hail of rocks fell on the defenders, who retreated on order, to positions inside the command post. Seemingly out of nowhere, an Air Force policewoman appeared with her guard dog and positioned herself inside the commanding officer's empty office, ready to order her dog to bite the first migrant to invade that space. Moments later, rocks started to crash through the windows and litter the floor. It then occurred to Major Brian J. Vincent, now executive officer of the staff at Camp Bulkeley, to release the detainee still being held in the command post. This placated most of the rioting migrants, many of whom simply ebbed away.⁵⁰

The defenders then telephoned Redlich, who was discussing Operation Clean Sweep with General Williams at his headquarters on McCalla. Redlich authorized the use of pepper spray, and General Williams promised immediate water

relief. Moments later, the reaction force from 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, succeeded in clearing the roadblock and literally fighting and clubbing its way through a still very hostile crowd to the command post. The siege was over. Six Marines had incurred minor injuries. Lieutenant Colonel Allen visited the injured Marines at his battalion aid station, and seeing their injuries reinforced his determination to set things right.⁵¹

As the crisis at the command post ended, the JTF was applying the finishing touches to the plan for Clean Sweep. Around 1400, Redlich returned to his headquarters and prepared to deliver a warning to all Cuban camp leaders before launching the operation. He directed they come to his office at 1500 to hear the warning, which had been carefully drafted and translated into Spanish to minimize the potential for misunderstandings. Redlich's points were simple: the migrants had disappointed him and General Williams by taking advantage of their good will; they had violated rules and regulations designed for the safety and security of all; further assaults against U.S. persons or property would not be tolerated; and finally,



Photo courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen

On 12 September 1994, well-equipped Marines stepped off to conduct Operation Clean Sweep, subduing unruly Cuban migrants in one camp after another. Riot control techniques demonstrated a strong presence, which prevented further escalation.



DVIC DN-ST-98-02142

Marines encountered strong hostility from Cuban migrants at Camp Hunt on 12 September during Operation Clean Sweep, which aimed at reestablishing order in the area.

any migrant not within their assigned camps at 1700 that evening would face apprehension and indefinite administrative segregation.⁵²

The migrant leaders found the tone of Redlich's decree out of character for him and somewhat ominous. The word spread quickly among the Cubans, and by 1655 the quiet before the storm had settled on Guantanamo. Radio Range Road was strangely empty, clear of all but the most hard-bitten migrants, who jeered and cursed at any soldiers or Marines who happened to be in sight. Meanwhile, just out of plain sight at Camp Quick, the assault force was forming like Roman legionnaires, carrying shields and batons, wearing shin guards, helmets and face protectors. With the companies of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, in the lead, the final composition of the force included two battalions of the 2d Air Defense Artillery Brigade (USA), four companies of the 716th Military Police Battalion (USA) under Lieutenant Colonel Garver, two psychological warfare teams with loudspeakers, eight teams of military working dogs, and elements of other groups, including a detachment of elite surveillance and target acquisition Marines armed with shotguns.⁵³

The plan was to establish two parallel lines—one along the cliffs to seaward, the other along Radio Range Road—and advance the lines toward each other like a vice with the Cubans and the camps in between. If the lead companies tired, other companies were to leapfrog forward to maintain the impetus. As each camp was uncovered, Marine engineers and MP detachments were to peel off to repair breaks in the wire, begin searching for contraband and reestablish internal security.⁵⁴

The men of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, built up a full head of steam waiting for the order to deploy. Then, just before 1700, they began to tap their riot batons and nightsticks in unison against the ground and their shin guards, beating out an ominous tattoo that echoed down the line of camps. All but the most obtuse migrants knew that times were about to change. Then, at precisely 1700, the task force threw plywood boards over the perimeter of Camp Quick and breached the wire to begin the advance. It was, Captain Gayl remembered, an awe-inspiring sight to see the long lines of Marines stepping off in perfect formation, fully equipped, with company guidons flapping in the hot breeze and waning sunlight.

Although it was a little unfair to the soldiers who marched with the Marines, Captain Gayl thought of the scene in the movie "The Wind and the Lion" when the Marines marched across the desert behind an enormous eagle, globe and anchor flag to rescue Candice Bergen.⁵⁵

Initially, all went very well and the migrants melted out of the way and back into their camps, obeying the commands relayed by the psychological warfare detachments over their mobile loudspeakers. Hundreds of migrants simply watched in stunned silence from the perimeters of their camps. Then rocks started to fly from within some of the camps. The troublemakers apparently thought the assault force did not plan to enter the camps and they could act with impunity. They quickly found out they were wrong. True to his plan, Lieutenant Colonel Allen ordered his commanders to go into the camps and retrieve the rock-throwers, which led to scenes of Marines and soldiers breaching the wire, chasing their targets through mazes of tents and clotheslines to finally tackle, cuff and drag them out of the camps and on to the side of the road subdued and in shock. There they waited for buses to take them to administrative segregation. If anything, these actions deepened the silence among most

Cubans. But as time went on, cheers and applause for the soldiers and Marines broke the silence. Most Cubans did not care for the troublemakers any more than Allen did.⁵⁶

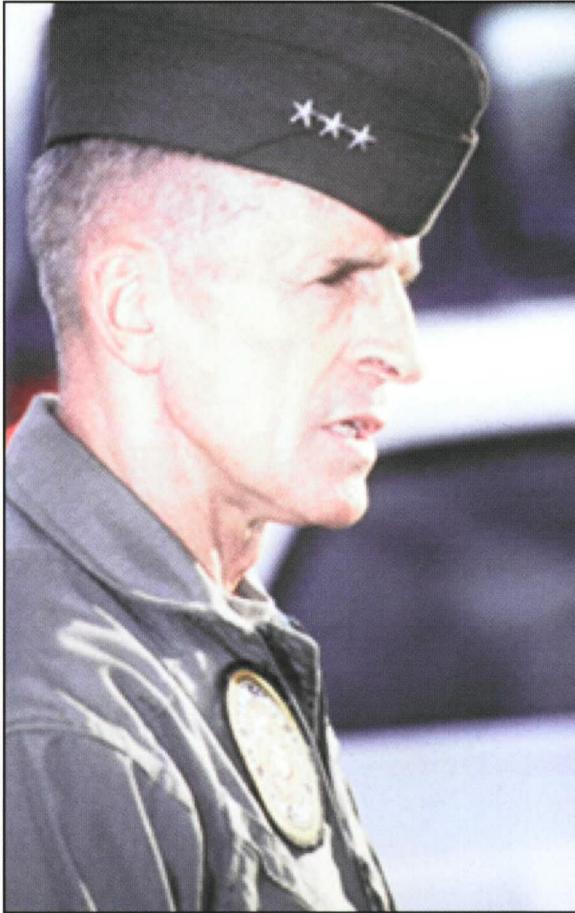
The assault force encountered particularly strong hostility at Camp Hunt, an all-male camp. Hundreds of angry migrants, perched on and around the portable toilets lining the perimeter of the camp, jeered at the Marines and soldiers and threw rocks, first at the forces on the seaside of the camp and then shifting their focus to the threat from the landward side. For a time, the hail of rocks was so thick that every member of the battalion command group was hit at least once. A platoon of Marines from Company E, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, stormed and breached the gate to the camp and formed on line. The 39 Marines routed the migrants, who fled by the hundreds toward the rear of the camp.⁵⁷

A similar drama occurred outside Camp November, near the end of the mile-long line of camps. The migrants pulled concertina wire across the road to create an obstacle. The first Marines to the obstacle were from Company F, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines. They paused, some of them resting on one knee, tired and thirsty after more than an hour of tremendous exertion in the



Photo courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen

Cuban migrants who resisted the Marines in Operation Clean Sweep found themselves restrained with flexicuffs and loaded on board trucks on their way to administrative segregation.



DVIC DM-ST-97-00168

LiGen Robert B. Johnston, Commander, U.S. Marine Forces, Atlantic, was one of the main force providers for Joint Task Force 160. He is shown here during a visit to Guantanamo Bay in December 1994.

heat. The inevitable barrage of rocks began and the Marines raised their shields in self-protection. There was a flurry of activity while the company commander talked to some of his men. Two Marines then broke from the ranks and ran toward the camp where they threw themselves on their shields and then onto the wire. The company ran over their backs into the camp, chasing the stunned troublemakers into the arms of the air defense soldiers who had established blocking positions from the rear.⁵⁸

The operation was a complete success and ended between 1900 and 2000. Order had been restored without casualties on either side. There were a few bruises and broken lips, but no injury serious enough to require hospitalization. Allen's troops had not been afraid to use force, but had done so with discipline and restraint. Between 120 and 200 migrants were detained and removed

to administrative segregation. The Marines and soldiers were both exhausted and elated after the days of frustration and some humiliation.⁵⁹

The next day, 13 September, started much the same: two impressive columns of Marines and soldiers ran sorties from Camp Quick in the morning to conduct the second phase of Clean Sweep. But now the pace was much more deliberate and there was little resistance. The Marines and soldiers surrounded the camps one by one and faced outboard, effectively isolating them. Army MPs then entered the camps and searched them systematically, paying particular attention to tents and individuals that had aroused suspicion. Using ground and aerial photography, the JTF had kept track of individuals who regularly incited the crowds and of unusually popular and active tents. The MPs found more than one makeshift armory where skilled craftsmen had been fashioning a variety of weapons: knives out of banding wire, machetes from scrap iron and aluminum and pikes from tent poles and 16-penny nails.⁶⁰

During Operation Clean Sweep, most migrants abided by Lieutenant Colonel Redlich's amnesty policy, which was broadcast over loudspeakers. If they voluntarily surrendered contraband weapons, they would not go to administrative detention, which they knew was not a pleasant place to be. Administrative detention already was home to a variety of sociopaths and criminals. As a result, MPs found weapons in many places. Some migrants had pitched their weapons over the concertina wire to avoid any association with their tents. Others had piled the weapons neatly in common areas. Security forces hauled the weapons by the truckload to an enormous dump behind Camp Quick. When it all was over, the MP commander, Lieutenant Colonel Garver, estimated his men had confiscated more than seven tons of weapons.⁶¹ It had been another hot, long and exhausting day. But it also had been another satisfying day.

The unrest at Guantanamo Bay was more than a passing interest to Atlantic Command and its Marine component in Norfolk. On 11 September, the commanding general of Marine Forces, Atlantic, Lieutenant General Robert B. Johnston, called General Williams to offer the assistance of an air alert battalion from Camp Lejeune along with the 8th Marines regimental staff, under Colonel Jennings B. Beavers II, a plain-spoken Missourian, and an energetic general officer, Brigadier General Raymond P. Ayres, Jr. The idea was for General Ayres to form a joint security

group and take over external security for the entire base, including the barracks and the fence line. The regimental staff would run a combat operations center for multiple battalions, a capability the JTF did not possess. Relieved of that burden, General Williams and his troops would be free to focus on internal security to handle whatever happened inside the camps. Although he would have preferred not to have yet another general officer on board Guantanamo—there already was a Navy admiral under him in the JTF—General Williams thought the plan was a “great idea: ... [the] disturbances ... really pointed up ... [the] need for a single security manager for the whole place.”⁶²

Within hours, the air alert battalion, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, under the command of the well-respected Lieutenant Colonel Dennis J. Hejlik, had mustered and was enroute. The reinforcements landed at Guantanamo Bay over the following two days. By the time General Ayres and Colonel Beavers had assembled their staff and troops, order had been reestablished and the pace was much slower than it had been a few days earlier. During a meeting on 14 September, General Williams reaffirmed the distinction between external and internal security, which

would remain the responsibility of the camp commanders, and devoted his energies to making the newcomers understand the mission. By now General Williams knew exactly where the line ran between persuasion and cooperation on the one hand and force and compulsion on the other. His fear was that the newcomers might have arrived with different ideas about the need to use force.⁶³

On 15 September, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, came under the operational control of Colonel Beavers, now officially commanding officer, External Security Forces, also known as the Joint Security Group. The new organization conducted a successful security sweep of the golf course camps and worked with internal security forces to build (or rebuild) the infrastructure of the camps. In the calm after the riots, Lieutenant Colonels Redlich and Allen were able to make the rounds to all their camps and tell the Cubans they were not in a position to make any more demands. But, the two officers added, they were still free to work with the JTF to improve living conditions, which was the planned third stage of the pacification operation.⁶⁴

For his part, General Williams was guardedly optimistic. He hoped the large shipment of Cubans unloaded on 15 September was the last. It



DVIC DD-SD-99-03701

Haitian migrants with their meager belongings line up to be processed for return to Haiti during Operation Uphold Democracy. All those going home went voluntarily.



DVIC DM-ST-97-00101

While some Cuban migrants attempted to return to Cuba, others waited patiently as the American government determined their fate. In an attempt to alleviate the boredom, Cpl Manuel Terg and a group of Cuban migrants sort out cargo tie down straps awaiting shipment.

seemed the Cuban-American agreement to curtail rafting and improve immigration might take hold. As such, he looked forward to devoting his time and energy to improving conditions within the camps, which for him was still an excellent way to prevent unrest.⁶⁵

On 19 September, the focus shifted briefly back to the Haitian camps. U.S. forces landed in Haiti on 19 and 20 September, which created a stir at Camp McCalla.* The JTF arranged for as many Haitians as possible to watch the CNN news broadcasts on the eve of the invasion. The camps were deathly quiet. The next day, there was a ceremony of remembrance for the Haitians who had died during the military dictatorship. More than 100 Haitians, dressed in white, chanted and marched through the compounds.⁶⁶ The Haitian camps were not so peaceful the following day. A number of migrants threw rocks at JTF soldiers and airmen out of frustration. While the day of liberation had come for their homeland, they could not go anywhere and many of them felt they were truly in limbo.⁶⁷ Fortunately for those who wanted to go home, the JTF was soon able

to offer voluntary repatriation back to Haiti, which began on 24 September.⁶⁸ The question of involuntary repatriation—of Haitians who were ineligible to go to the United States but refused to go home—would not be settled for many months.

During the same period, the Cuban camps were largely quiet. It was hard to believe the same players had staged the dramatic unrest a few days earlier. But the absence of angry crowds did not mean the absence of dangerous problems. General Williams wrote in his diary that one of his main concerns was the absence of a workable policy for the voluntary repatriation of Cuban migrants. He noted that one U.S. policy said Cubans who wanted to go to the United States needed to go home to apply for a visa, while another policy kept them at Guantanamo. The Haitians who had tired of the uncertainty and boredom of life in the camps were free to go home, but what about the Cubans who felt the same way?⁶⁹

Many impatient Cubans did not wait for the U.S. Government to make up its mind. Since they had learned the hard way that it was pointless to challenge the American security forces directly, they adopted other tactics. Secretive groups of

* Detailed in Part II.

troublemakers formed small units, breached the wire at night and disappeared into the darkness before anyone could react. Not surprisingly, most of these migrants were single males. Their apparent goal was to return to Cuba by either walking through the minefields or swimming. The later option typically involved jumping from the cliffs near the fence line, swimming out to sea and then homeward. Both propositions were dangerous, and the whole situation was unacceptable to the JTF. First, no one on the JTF staff, let alone the base or the barracks commander, was ready to tolerate something akin to small, hostile paramilitary units roaming the base.⁷⁰ Second, the JTF could not accept the risk of widespread injury or death, either on the fence line or through drowning.⁷¹ Colonel Beavers felt it was his personal responsibility to tighten security to make it more difficult for the migrants to bring harm upon themselves or the security forces.

One measure instituted by Colonel Beavers was to group single males in Camp November near the beach and the fence line with Cuba where the risks in swimming home were reduced, although still real. Then there was a tactical package designed to discourage and defeat outbreaks, especially on the landward side. The routine of perimeter foot patrols augmented by local quick reaction forces changed. The patrols were simply too slow or too few and far between to do the job. Instead, the joint security group built guard towers and put Marines and soldiers in them. Although the group retained a heavily armed, centrally controlled mobile quick reaction force for large-scale disturbances, the local reaction forces now took the form of platoon-sized patrols in the backcountry where they established patrol bases. The camouflaged and armed patrols operated on a variety of routes covering many of the most likely avenues of escape from the camps. Every so often, the patrols would bounce off the wire, coming close enough to a camp to make themselves conspicuous for a few minutes, then disappearing back into the darkness. The migrants were left to wonder where they had gone. The routine, with its combination of psychological effect and presence on the ground and in the towers, seemed to work. While it is impossible to know how many Cubans were deterred by these measures, the number of incidents reflected in situation reports dwindled.⁷²

By late September, the situation was secure enough to allow increments of 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, which had done its share of the hard

work and then some, to return home. This meant some of the battalion's Marines had spent more than 110 days deployed in the thick of migrant operations. On 24 September, 2d Battalion, 6th Marines, turned over its riot control gear to 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, which took over as the "white sleeves" battalion. To make it clear the new troops on the block were every bit as determined and capable as their predecessors, 1st Battalion staged a show of force at the Bulkeley and Radio Range camps. The Marines marched slowly around the camps in a column of two, partly to conserve energy and thus be able to look fit and ready in the withering heat, and partly to give the impression of a larger force. It worked. Once again, the jeers and catcalls which greeted the first of the grim-faced, heavily-armed Marines faded to total silence, broken at times by cheers as the procession continued.⁷³

Before he left Guantanamo, Lieutenant Colonel Allen prepared a memorandum entitled "Migrant Security Environment and Lessons Learned" for the External Security Forces commander. The memorandum began with his general observations on migrant operations: that security was a state of mind and a combined arms effect. It was not simply a matter of force, but a result of all of the efforts of the JTF, which ranged from housing and feeding the migrants to implementing the administration's immigration policy, which combined to make the migrant feel secure or insecure. The next major point was that, even though the Marines had embarked on a humanitarian operation, they needed to think in terms of low intensity conflict, like the Marines who had written the classic *Small Wars Manual*. Next, he analyzed the various threat groups in the Cuban migrant population—from agent provocateurs to criminals to members of a religious cult called "Palo Mayombe" to troublemakers or young, bored, excitable male malcontents. He stressed the need to deploy intelligence resources early to gather information about these groups, which was mostly a matter of debriefing them and those who worked with them and collating the results.⁷⁴

Allen next addressed the concept of "seeing the elephant" (a metaphor from the American Civil War for the baptism of fire in combat). For a Marine or soldier, the elephant was enormous in the first riot. The confusion, the crowds and the emotions were overwhelming, making it hard to know what to think tactically, how to analyze the tactical problem or even how to do the right thing. The commanders tended to fall back on



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Gen. John J. Sheehan, Commander in Chief, U.S. Atlantic Command, on one of his official visits to Guantanamo Bay in 1994. Joint Task Force 160 fell under his operational control.

frontal tactics, which meant lining troops up in riot formation and facing the crowd, “absorbing the mass and weight of the migrants against the line of riot shields.” When this happened, the troops took casualties from rocks, tent stakes, or homemade weapons.

Allen stressed that as long as the elephant was large, the frustration level among the troops would be correspondingly high. It was incumbent on commanders to take the emotional temperature of their troops and, if necessary, to provide outlets to prevent outbursts of brutality. The outlets could take the form of training exercises, platoon or company school circles, or intervention by chaplains or psychologists. The colonel noted separately that he had been very lucky to have U.S. Navy Lieutenant Michael A. Colson assigned to his battalion as chaplain; Lieutenant Colson, who had worked with refugees for years in Africa before joining the Navy, was a master at defusing

tensions and even making the troops laugh about their experiences.⁷⁵

Once the elephant had shrunk, it was easier for small unit commanders to think through the problems they faced and develop more effective tactics. The key was the use of controlled violence. Surprise was paramount. The security forces would need to spot and mark troublemakers—those who seemed to be sparking the violence, whether from the front or from another quarter. Then the security forces needed to “up the violence ante” quickly and decisively, dispatching snatch teams to seize the troublemakers, subdue them and make them disappear. Snatch teams might come from the front, sides or rear of the crowd, and more than one snatch team might be active at the same time. The effect was as much psychological as physical. Snatch teams made every member of the crowd feel vulnerable because the protective sense of anonymity, being lost in the crowd, was gone. This was usually enough to deflate a demonstration. Deprived of its leaders and its momentum, the crowd would generally break up.

The memorandum emphasized a collateral point about the need for active, aggressive intelligence collection during demonstrations, especially with video cameras. Collection served to target additional troublemakers, detect new and different weapons and identify hotbeds of unrest within camps. Videotapes also were useful to critique and improve the performance of the troops following an operation. Another important collateral point regarded the need for internal security forces to remain active during demonstrations to identify and contain potential problems early on.

After reviewing the brief phase of escape and evasion by determined single males after 13 September, Allen emphasized the key to success was to think in terms of low intensity conflict and to continue to analyze the threat, remaining alert to changes and adapting to meet those changes. In the version of the memorandum that appeared in the *Marine Corps Gazette* in February 1995, Allen asked the rhetorical question: if he had established “violence supremacy” earlier on, would the general breakdown of order have occurred? He answered his own question, writing that “increased but controlled violence” might have prevented the problem. Some argued later it was wrong to focus on the need for violence supremacy because the real issue was the shortages of food, water, and sanitation. Allen countered such arguments stating, you cannot hand

out loaves of bread when people are throwing rocks at you.⁷⁶

Quality of Life at Guantanamo

The next phase of the operation was anti-climactic. It was not one of crisis upon crisis, but a time when Joint Task Force 160 made considerable progress on two fronts: improving the quality of life for migrants while tightening security. The quality of life initiatives aimed first at solving basic problems: better plumbing, better food and the like. The work was more difficult because the JTF was competing with the occupation of Haiti for resources, but after a while the adjutants and the logisticians came through. Reinforced and resupplied, the JTF was able to start the process of meeting migrants' higher needs, such as arranging phone and mail service and building schools and sports centers. Some 140 chaplains worked to meet spiritual needs. One interesting refinement was the establishment of shelters for battered or threatened women. Regrettably, a number of migrants expressed their frustrations by abusing their female companions. As time went on, more Cubans became involved in these initiatives, especially when it came to helping with building projects. Most Cuban migrants were active, restless, energetic persons—otherwise they would not have ventured to sea in the first place—and it was not difficult to channel their energy.⁷⁷

There also was some relief for the JTF in that substantial numbers of Cuban migrants opted for



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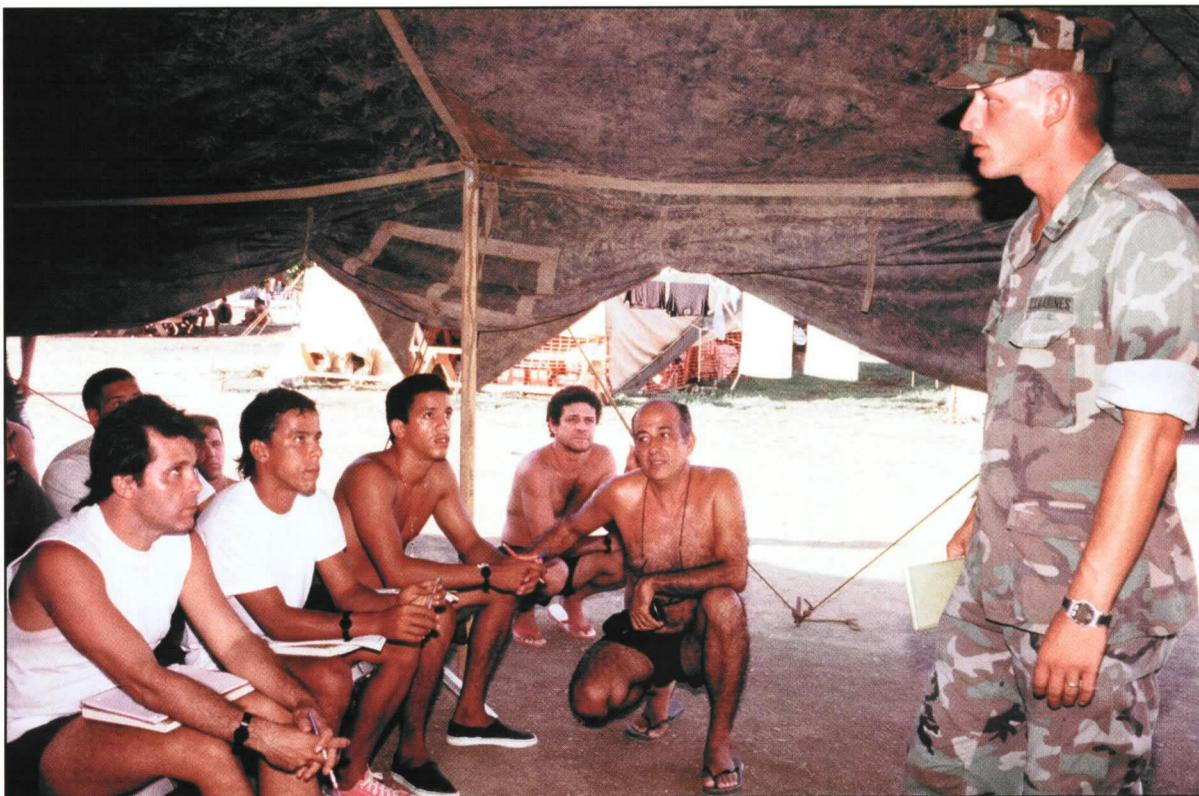
Prominent visitors to Guantanamo Bay Naval Base never stopped coming. The Honorable Ted Stevens, Senator from Alaska and chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, talks with BGen Raymond P. Ayres, who succeeded BGen Michael J. Williams as commanding general of Joint Task Force 160.

safe haven in Panama, thereby relieving the pressure on the facilities at Guantanamo. By mid-October, some 5,000 migrants had gone to Panama. Ultimately, a total of roughly 8,600 made the trip.⁷⁸

With time to focus on security, 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, quickly settled into the routine and the Joint Security Group prepared for many possible contingencies. The group determined the proper ratio of security forces to migrants was one infantry battalion to 10,000 migrants, and Colonel Beavers learned for himself that the best defense was to contain disturbances before they escalated. There now were platoon- and company-sized reaction forces prepared for multiple missions, which they rehearsed at least once a week. One mission was, of course, riot control. Another plan was for a hostage/barricade contingency. Finally, there was the destructive weather plan: what to do in case of a hurricane.⁷⁹

The JTF continued to build more watchtowers, and work started on a very secure holding area for troublemakers at an isolated part of the base. Ultimately named Camp X-Ray and run by Air Force Security Police, it boasted state-of-the-art security features and was virtually escape-proof. Although Camp X-Ray was not a prison, many of its inmates were hard to handle and the regimen was strict. For example, the policy was to select only the most mature and stable airmen to work at the facility because they would face abuse from the inmates that ranged from insults to assaults. As such, every member of the security team needed excellent self-control.⁸⁰

Another security initiative sprung from an idea originating with General Ayres: that General Williams make contact with his Cuban counterpart to discuss the issue of Cuban escapees. Williams endorsed the idea, and in early October, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to work the issue of military-to-military transfers through the base's northeast gate.⁸¹ As a result, there was direct contact between the Cuban and American commanders by the spring of 1995. Usually it was the JTF commander who met his Cuban counterpart, but at least once it was the commander in chief from U.S. Atlantic Command, General John J. Sheehan. The commanders elaborated a protocol for the orderly repatriation of small numbers of migrants (approximately 200 in one representative six-month period) through the northeast gate. The migrants who went home through the gate included both voluntary and involuntary returnees. Barracks Marines, who were responsible for con-



DVIC DN-ST-98-00744

1stLt Virgilio Gonzalez of 1st Battalion, 2d Marines, instructs Cuban migrants about American customs. Since it appeared that many, if not all, would eventually continue on to the United States, the joint task force held classes to prepare them for life in their new country.

ducting the operations, took elaborate precautions.⁸²

The Marine commander picked his most physically intimidating Marines to escort the migrants to what was literally a line in the sand, one that someone had painted white. If a migrant did not want to go home, or had been a troublemaker, he might be shackled hand and foot. On a few occasions, bodies of migrants who had died of natural causes were repatriated in caskets. An American military officer, a translator and a State Department representative officiated at each transfer. As the American detachment approached the line, a corresponding detachment of Cubans, who were typically young and looked undernourished, did the same. The American officer would read a short statement and the migrant would then step back into Cuba and his previous life. If the migrant looked like a troublemaker, the Cubans might take hold of him physically. Neither side carried or showed weapons. But watching the transaction from a camouflaged position in the brush were Marine spotters and snipers, along with a small reserve standing ready to intervene at a moment's notice in case of trouble. The Cubans

almost certainly had a similar standard operating procedure; the Marines noticed the number of bushes on the Cuban side of the line changed according to the operational scenario of the day. But for the most part, the two sides treated each other with respect and the transfers were trouble-free. At times, relations were almost amicable. One day a Cuban soldier tripped a mine while clearing brush on the Cuban side of the line, injuring himself and a comrade. Although they could not cross the line, Marines rushed forward with battle dressings, which other Cubans reached over to accept. The Cubans thanked the Marines for the medical gear and later sent word the two soldiers had survived.⁸³

Over time, the hard work paid off. With only a few exceptions, the camps stayed quiet. After September 1994, the situation was so calm that inbound Marine replacements, who had heard about the past riots and trained hard to suppress future riots, were surprised to find the biggest challenge was often boredom.⁸⁴

In early October, General Williams learned an Army officer would replace him. Within a few days, the word changed, and the new decision

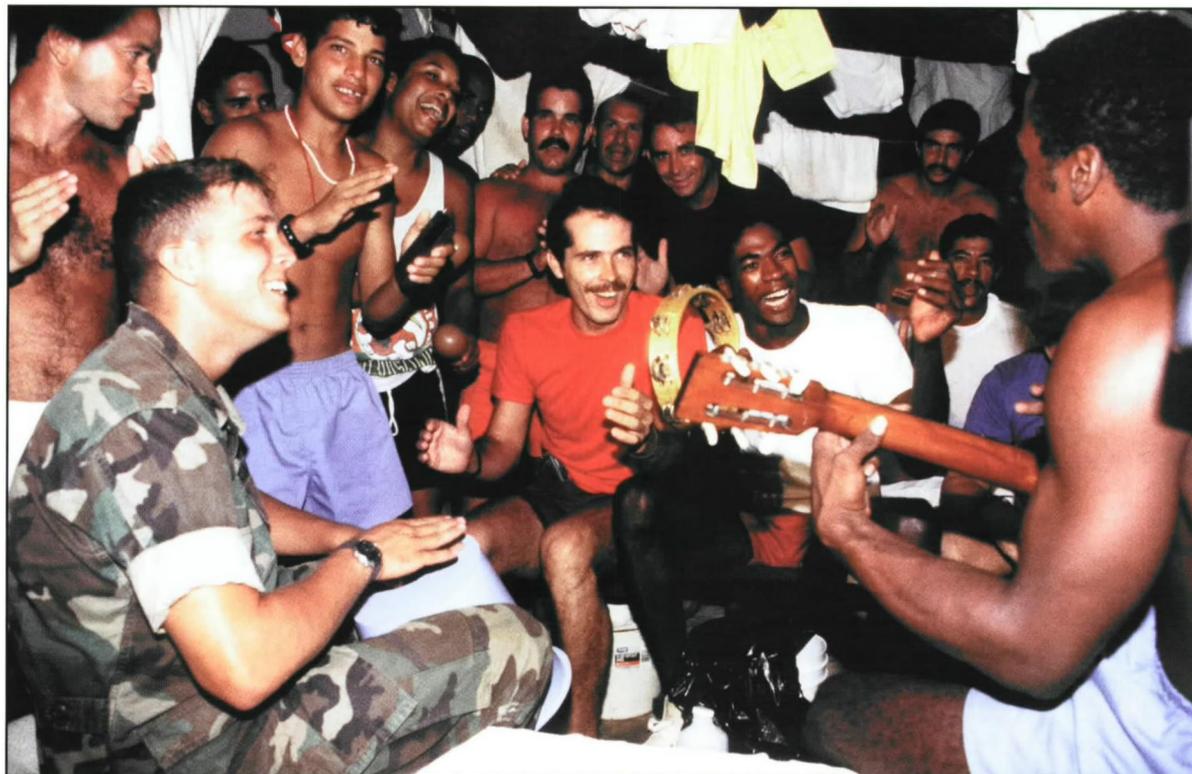
was that General Ayres would replace General Williams, who would return to Camp Lejeune and resume his duties as the commander of 2d Force Service Support Group. When the formal turnover occurred on 17 October, Williams reflected on the recent past, saying he was “extremely proud of the...men and women, military and civilian, of Joint Task Force 160.” From their initial mission of processing Haitian migrants in Kingston, Jamaica, to their “present mission of caring for over 40,000 Cubans and Haitians at Guantanamo Bay, JTF personnel ... [had] demonstrated professional competence, compassion, and a willingness to work together.”⁸⁵

General Ayres agreed. When he took command, he saluted the JTF’s “tremendous improvements” in sheltering and caring for migrants. He also noted he had inherited “the most interwoven JTF” he knew of.⁸⁶ He soon learned for himself just how interwoven the command was; he saw that the 7,000-plus service personnel thought of themselves first as members of a group with a common mission rather than as soldiers, sailors, Marines, or airmen. He noted further that the representatives of the various civilian agencies, both

government and non-government, worked hand-in-hand with their military counterparts in the same spirit.⁸⁷

One of the biggest threats in October and November was that seasonal rains would make the golf course and some of the beach camps virtually uninhabitable. The JTF moved to consolidate and weatherproof camps. Many of the tents became “hardbacks” with wooden floors and walls. But the JTF was unable to carry out its plan to move Cubans to the hardstand at Camp McCalla, which had obvious advantages in wet weather.⁸⁸

The reason was that many Haitian migrants were not ready to go home. The flow of Haitians ready to follow the American occupation forces back to Haiti had slowed to a trickle. Some of the remainder said they wanted to wait until President Jean-Bertrand Aristide returned to Port-au-Prince. After he did return in mid-October, others said they wanted to wait until he asked for them. Since American policy included a built-in bias against forcing anyone to return home, the JTF did what it could to promote the idea it was safe for the migrants to go home. One initiative was to find



DVIC DF-ST-98-00783

A Cuban migrant in Camp Kilo plays the guitar as a Marine sings along. Members of the joint task force interacted with migrants in various settings, but like the members of Joint Task Force GTMO two years earlier, were required to keep relationships on a professional footing.

out where their homes were, and then collect information and first-hand testimony about conditions in Haiti to give the migrants an idea of what they could expect to find at home. But there were not many takers, and, as of mid-November, there were still some 6,000 Haitians in the camps. The principal exception was a group of 992 Haitian migrants who were selected and trained for public security functions to help replace the corrupt police forces in their home country. Once trained, they were eager to get to work.⁸⁹

The Cubans' situation was more complicated. For those who decided to go home rather than stay in limbo at Guantanamo, getting home remained a difficult proposition. Apart from the handful escorted to the northeast gate, migrants trying to get home found a long wait getting on a flight to Havana. For the impatient ones—approximately 1,000 between September 1994 and March 1995—there still was the fence line and the beach.⁹⁰

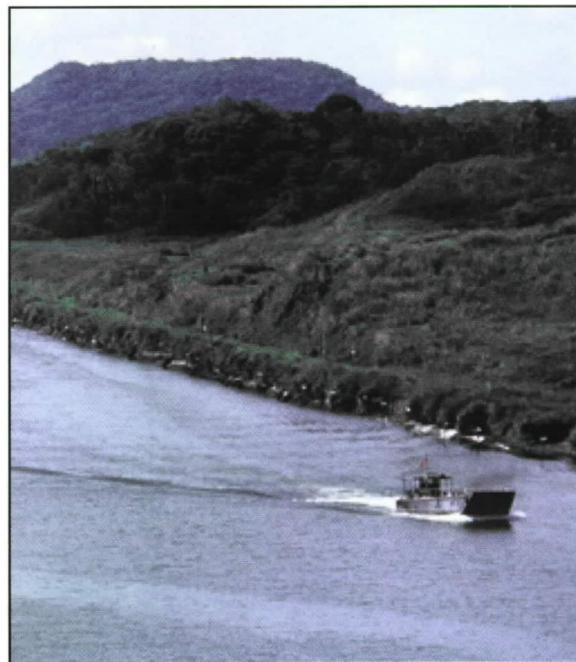
On 6 November, for example, 85 migrants escaped from Camp November. Forty made it across two strands of concertina wire, down the nearly vertical cliffs to sea and through the half mile of surf and strong currents to Cuba. But the majority of the 25,000 Cubans decided to stay in the camps. They were certain the American policy would change and they would eventually make their way to the United States. For them it was heartening to watch the Clinton administration loosen its policy by stages. The adjustment made in October 1994 allowed very young and unaccompanied, elderly, or sick migrants to go to Florida (which meant there was a stream of migrants who feigned illness).⁹¹ Then, on 10 November, the administration redefined young, which now meant any unaccompanied migrants under 17, and on 2 December 1994, some families with dependent children became eligible for parole.⁹² Most migrants concluded it was only a matter of time until the policy eroded completely, and, although there were still some tense moments to come, they generally settled down to wait patiently.

Trouble in Panama

By late 1994, a different group of Marines was facing many of the same migrants—and the same problems—a few hundred miles away in Panama. They formed the Marine Corps Security Force (MCSF) Company, the successor to Marine Barracks, Panama. Roughly 120-strong, their

home was the large, elegant headquarters of the barracks at the U.S. Naval Station Panama Canal, called Rodman Naval Station, which was near the Pacific entrance to the canal. Their job was to provide security for Rodman, as well as for other naval installations in the Canal Zone, including the Naval Security Group Activity on Galeta Island some 60 miles away on the Atlantic Coast.

The Marine company began to focus on migrants in July when its commander, Major Gilbert Desroches, received a call from Southern Command (SouthCom), the unified command which flew its flag in Panama and had long been a preserve of the U.S. Army. The call was somewhat unusual. Under normal circumstances, Desroches had no direct contact with SouthCom. (He reported to the officer-in-charge, Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet, Detachment South, Captain Arthur N. Rowley III, USN, the senior naval officer in Panama who was also the base commander at Rodman.) It turned out SouthCom was not interested in the billet Major Desroches held, but rather in his background: Desroches was born in Haiti and spoke Creole. SouthCom wanted him to join a group of officers enroute to Guantanamo,



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A narrow road runs alongside the south side of the Panama Canal, near the Gaillard Cut. The only access to the migrant camps in the Empire Ranges was along a similar road. Given the terrain, a small number of Marines were able to stop hundreds of rampaging Cuban migrants from marching to Panama City in December 1994.