

Photo courtesy of BGen George H. Walls, Jr.

During a happy moment, BGen George H. Walls meets with "screened-in" Haitian migrants eligible to proceed to the United States. Hospital-style plastic identification bracelets, visible on the right, were provided to each migrant and became indispensable in keeping track of individuals.

ing perfect sense to planners, were confusing to the migrants. For example, the Haitian idea of family was the extended family, not just the nuclear family. And grouping single males together turned out to be a force multiplier for malcontents, who grew increasingly vocal in early December.

Unrest at Camp McCalla

Task force members often felt a degree of uncertainty about the future. They did not know how long they would be on the island or what, exactly, was U.S. Government policy on a range of migrant issues. But that confusion was minor compared to the uncertainty felt by the migrants. From their point of view, life had turned into a strange combination of action and inaction that started with a dramatic rescue at sea by a warship followed by a long wait under difficult conditions afloat. Then, one day, seemingly at random, they were transferred to shore, placed in compounds bounded by barbed wire and asked to subsist on strange food. While it was better to live in a camp

than on the deck of a ship, there was now even more waiting and little hard information on their status. Were they on their way to the U.S.? Or was there some less desirable fate in store for them?

These uncertainties led to various kinds of disturbances in the camps during the period from 5 to 17 December even though the joint task force continued to work tirelessly to implement its plans, often ahead of schedule. Already, a camp newspaper was being published in the native Creole language to provide up-to-date information, a 60-bed hospital for migrants was up and running, and a new water system for laundry had been installed. Portable toilets and showers were in place and a good lighting system illuminated the hundreds of tents austere divided by rolls of concertina wire into compounds—which were designated McCalla I, II, and III. The screened-in migrants had been moved four miles away to Camp Bulkeley to await their happy fate. Camp McCalla was, almost by definition, a haven for the unhappy, the confused, and the angry.²⁷

While none of the early disturbances were particularly serious, they did not bode well for the

future. A 5 December demonstration at Camp Bulkeley was sparked by complaints the processing was too slow and camp conditions were too restrictive. A demonstration at Camp McCalla II on 10 December grew from a lurid rumor the Cuban army planned to storm the base and kill the Haitians if they were not out of Cuba within five days. The rumor spawned after one migrant reported hearing the news on a Cuban radio station. The result was near panic. Responding later to reporters, Major Donald J. Kappel, the JTF's public affairs officer, said: "There were no injuries, no violence—just agitation. People were yelling and running around the camp. ... Once we got wind of this, we told them ... they were safe and no one would hurt them."²⁸ Nevertheless, demonstrations at McCalla II and McCalla III continued over the next few days. Marines and soldiers erected additional concertina barriers between the various groups as a precaution.²⁹

On the night of 14 December, McCalla II was once again the focus of attention. There was a series of meetings in the compound, which housed single males as well as a few families. The meetings began small, with key individuals

haranguing listeners. Videotapes made by the JTF intelligence section (J-2) show organizers speaking and gesticulating to groups seated on the ground around them. The leaders made their way through the compound threatening and cajoling others into sharing their viewpoint. A few hold-outs that stayed in their tents were aggressively harassed; some may have been beaten.³⁰

The JTF found out the next day just how far the militants were willing to go. General Walls and his staff were in their offices in the small headquarters building on a hill overlooking Camp McCalla. Sergeant Major Berry recalled General Walls coming down the passageway and exclaiming, "Sergeant Major, they're out of the camp!" Walls and Berry, along with the general's aide and driver, quickly covered the short distance to the camp to confront the crowd, which comprised roughly 500 males from McCalla II who had gathered along the north and east fences. General Walls attempted to reason with them across the looped strands of concertina wire. Some of the demonstrators were polite, thanking him for his efforts but adding it was time for them to move on. Other demonstrators were more hostile, threaten-



Photo courtesy of BGen George H. Walls, Jr.

During a less happy moment in early December 1991, Haitian migrants protest camp conditions. Although conditions at the camp were benign, many vocal migrants were eager to move on to the United States and did not understand the delay.

ing the general if he did not comply with their demands. Approximately 50 migrants breached the northwest corner of the concertina wire, apparently planning to start their journey to the United States then and there by walking out of Camp McCalla and Guantanamo and proceeding through Cuba. Some even packed their meager belongings and were carrying them in bundles and satchels.³¹

As the situation quickly deteriorated, some of the migrants began throwing garbage and rocks, one object striking General Walls in the head. He was not injured, but his cover had been knocked off. He replaced his headgear and moved on, his entourage forming a protective ring around him. The general remarked to the sergeant major he would be happy when the U.S. Army military police (MPs) arrived. Sergeant Major Berry said they were already there and pointed to the rear, where some 10 meters away the MPs stood wearing riot gear with face shields already down. Some MPs had dogs with them. (Finding a large, shaggy but threatening Belgian Shepherd in their path, one group of Haitian “escapees” had simply turned around and gone back to the camp shortly before the general’s arrival on scene.) An Army chaplain, who arrived to lend a hand, fell to the ground after a full carton of milk hit him in the groin. Another soldier was bitten by a Haitian and evacuated. In the words of the official message announcing the disturbance to Norfolk, the JTF reported the “Haitians employed tent poles, cots, cot cross bars [the pieces of wood that stretched the canvas tight on the cots], gallon water jugs, and broken pieces of asphalt as weapons.”³² The migrants also used the cots to breach the lines of concertina wire by laying them across the rings of wire to form a bridge of sorts over the razor-sharp barbs.

The melee eventually ebbed and the riot was contained. Reinforcements arrived from various units, including the base and the barracks. Some were still wearing shower shoes and civilian clothes. In the end, no migrant made it out of the McCalla area.

However, confining the disturbance was not the same as defusing it. Within McCalla II, somewhere between 50 and 250 ringleaders fanned the flames and tried to spread the unrest to other compounds. They tore down all the general-purpose tents in their own compound and tried to cross into McCalla III. They were stopped by a group of Marines from the barracks and a detachment from the Service Support Group’s 8th

Engineer Support Battalion who, along with Army MPs, formed a perimeter around McCalla II. That did not stop the malcontents from shouting across the wire to the migrants in McCalla III and

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attempting to persuade them to join in the protest. They also directed their attention to the Haitian women and children who happened to be in McCalla II. Some of the post-action reports indicated the women and children had been held hostage. While this may have been too formal a description for their situation, they certainly were at the mercy of the malcontents and subject to pressure from them. At close of business on 15 December, the JTF reported it would keep the perimeter intact and, in understated official language, added: “tensions are such [that] it is currently deemed not prudent to reenter the camp to ensure internal security.”³³ At approximately the same time, General Walls asked for reinforcements from the mainland United States.³⁴

On the evening of 15 December, a representative of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees spoke with the rioters, who expressed their desire to leave the “prison” camp and talk to representatives from the Haitian community in the U.S. The migrants promised to suspend the rioting for 48 hours if the U.S. Government showed signs of preparing to move them from Guantanamo to the mainland. At the same time, General Walls, who labeled the situation “extremely volatile,” explored means of meeting the more legitimate demands—such as allowing migrants who already had been screened to proceed to the United States.³⁵ The general also made his message clear to the men in McCalla II. During a brief exchange, Walls told one of the malcontents that neither he nor, by implication, any of his cohorts were going to the United States because they were behaving irresponsibly. The general admonished him to change his behavior and asked if there were any questions. There were none.³⁶

The events of the night of 15 December set no one's mind at rest. The migrants conducted what appeared to be a voodoo ritual. Some wrapped themselves in white sheets and walked to the four corners of their compound, which represented the four corners of the earth, to consult with the spirits. They then drew strength from the earth by lying down on the ground near what appeared to be a makeshift voodoo shrine. (A voodoo shrine typically includes representations of Christian and

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voodoo religious figures and other objects shrouded with symbolic meaning, such as candles or glass jars.) The general and his staff worried the next step might be a blood sacrifice of some sort. One officer thought some of the Haitians believed that a sacrifice would hasten the arrival of the "magical bird" that would take them to Florida.³⁷ Another officer remembered hearing about a threat by the malcontents to start throwing babies over the fence if their demands were not met within 48 hours.³⁸ Still, there was some semblance of order in the camp. Migrants armed with makeshift weapons conducted what appeared to be patrols around the perimeter of the compound. Once again, the JTF intelligence staff filmed the proceedings, in part to make a record, and in part to make it easier to identify the ringleaders.³⁹

In the meantime, the reinforcements General Walls had requested were on their way. The responding unit was the air alert battalion from Camp Lejeune, which was at the time, 2d Battalion, 8th Marines, Lieutenant Colonel James C. Hardee commanding. Hardee's unit began deploying a total of 302 Marines and sailors from Company F and Company G and the supporting battle staff less than four hours after receiving the deployment order. The battalion was on the ground in Cuba by the early morning hours of 16 December.⁴⁰

While the battalion from Camp Lejeune was still in the air, General Walls' staff was drafting a

fragmentary order for Operation Take Charge, designed to regain control of the camp and to restore order within it. The order outlined six phases and essentially called for the JTF to establish a series of progressively smaller cordons to divide the malcontents into ever smaller and more manageable groups.⁴¹

The order stated that, even before the first phase, the JTF would conduct deception operations intended primarily to keep the migrants occupied until reinforcements arrived. In Phase I, scheduled to begin at 0400 on 17 December, the most basic cordon and breach of militant defenses would occur. The external security units would establish a cordon around the camp while the internal security units would break into the compound and establish a cordon around the migrants in the southeast corner of the camp. In Phase II, the JTF would set up additional cordons and sweep the compound for stragglers. In Phase III, the MPs would safeguard and transfer families that had the bad luck of being located in McCalla II. The MPs also would remove anything from the camp that could serve as a weapon. Phase IV called for putting up new barriers. During Phase V, the remaining migrants would be screened and searched, followed by the withdrawal of assault forces during Phase VI. Lieutenant Colonel Ted W. Hashimoto, commander of the U.S. Army's 504th Military Police Battalion, Fort Lewis, Washington, was to take control of the internal security force while Colonel Blair would assume control of all Marines present, including the newly arrived 2d Battalion, 8th Marines.

When identified in the course of Operation Take Charge, ringleaders would be detained and held for removal to a segregation facility, Camp VII, which was a cross between a holding facility and a brig. But the order placed specific limits on the use of force. The emphasis was to be a show of force, with actual force to be used only when necessary. Specific guidance was tailored to various threats the members of the JTF might face. Most of the troops in the operation would carry only riot gear, such as shields and batons. Migrants who were slow to move during the operation were to be helped to their feet and encouraged to move where directed. If they still did not move, they were to be subdued, restrained with plastic flexicuffs, and left for the snatch team. Violent resisters were to be subdued, cuffed, and placed face down in a prone position. If migrants rushed the line, troops were to use shields to push them off and escalate to batons only if nec-



DVIC DN-ST-92-05451

As camp life returned to normal following several days of disturbances, members of the U.S. Army's 82d Airborne Division Band perform for the migrants on Christmas Day 1991.

essary. If groups of migrants broke through the line, the troops on the line were to remain in formation and allow the snatch teams to handle the intrusion. All things considered, it was a very carefully planned operation that left little to chance and clearly indicated the commander's intent of control and restraint.

When the time came for the operation to begin in the early morning of 17 December, the Haitians in the camp were nearing exhaustion. Many were actually asleep when 0400 rolled around. This was part of the JTF plan: to strike when the migrants were at the end of their tether. There is no question the Haitians were taken completely by surprise, and it was not a pleasant surprise. Grim-faced Marines, some holding rifles with fixed bayonets, encircled the camp. Marine engineers wearing flak jackets and helmets and armed with breaching tools moved swiftly to make gaps in the wire through which the Army MPs, equipped with riot gear, entered the compound. The stunned migrants offered no resistance, and the first—and potentially most difficult—phase of the operation was over in nine minutes.⁴²

The JTF immediately proceeded to Phases II and III. It took some 30 minutes to transfer families to McCalla IV, which cleared the way for the

removal of all cots, tents, poles, and tent stakes. The Phase IV construction of a new barrier around McCalla II began within five hours of the start of the operation. All the male migrants in the camp were carefully searched and screened before being either returned to the camp or moved to Camp VII. The process included a check against the data collected on video by cameramen from the J-2 during the unrest. Whatever the destination, each migrant received two blankets and a cot—albeit a cot without wooden crossbars. As General Walls noted in his message to Norfolk, life in McCalla II would only return to normal once “migrants show a willingness to obey basic camp rules.”⁴³

The air alert battalion from Camp Lejeune continued to play a significant role, especially in reinforcing the exterior perimeter of McCalla II while the new barrier was being erected. When releasing the battalion on 23 December to return to Camp Lejeune, General Walls wrote the group had “conducted the joint operation with all the professionalism and spirit that U.S. Marines are known to possess.”⁴⁴

On the same day, the Commandant of the Marines Corps, General Carl E. Mundy, Jr., came to see what his Marines had accomplished.

General Mundy recognized the recent efforts of all Marines at Guantanamo and discussed how Operation GTMO might end. The same message that announced the Commandant's impending arrival discussed plans to repatriate migrants to Haiti, stating the JTF was to begin to prepare migrants for repatriation.⁴⁵

The plan showed the same refrain that had persisted throughout the operation. The preference, especially at the senior levels of command in Norfolk and Washington, was for the operation to end as soon as possible so units of the JTF could move on to other work. That point of view was especially important for small Services such as the Marines, which found its resources drained significantly by the operation. But as time went on, it became clear the types of challenges Marines faced at Guantanamo would become part of the operational realities in the post-Cold War era.

Anticlimax and Repatriation

New Year's Day 1992 came and went without any resolution of the situation. At the end of

December, there were some 7,000 Haitian migrants at Guantanamo. A month later, that number had swelled to more than 11,000. Then, on 31 January, the Supreme Court vacated lower court stays that had kept President George H. W. Bush's administration from forcibly repatriating migrants to Haiti. The day following the court action, JTF officers spread the word among screened-out migrants and asked for volunteers to go home on the first boats. Even if no one volunteered, there was no doubt the U.S. would repatriate screened-out migrants. "For the most part, they took it very calmly," General Walls commented to reporters, adding the migrants "understand that [the court's decision] allowed for involuntary repatriation."⁴⁶

The JTF was soon loading migrants onto Coast Guard cutters bound for Port-au-Prince, where they disembarked under international supervision in accordance with carefully crafted agreements between the Haitian and U.S. Governments, as well as various international organizations. The goal was to protect the returning migrants, and arrangements were made for United Nations and Red Cross representatives to monitor the process along with Haitian and U.S. officials.⁴⁷



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Among the prominent visitors to Camp McCalla was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen Colin L. Powell, shown here in February 1992 listening to Marine GySgt Ronald Antoine as he interprets for one of the migrant leaders, Pastor Edme Lexidan.



DVIC DN-ST-93-00308

At Port-au-Prince, where Coast Guard cutters had dropped them off, repatriated Haitian migrants wait for transportation back to their villages and an unknown reception.

While most screened-out migrants went peacefully, often relieved the boredom and uncertainty of life at Camp McCalla had come to an end, there were a few dramatic moments, especially when reporters were on hand. "Kill me now," wailed one migrant, flailing his arms. "If I go back to Haiti, they will kill me. ... No! I don't want to go back to Haiti!"⁴⁸

To keep order on the cutters, the JTF deployed Marines in their traditional role as shipboard security detachments. Prominent among the Marines selected for this duty were teams from the 2d and 3d Platoons of the Fleet Anti-Terrorist Security Team (FAST) Company, Atlantic, based in Norfolk, Virginia.⁴⁹ Marines from the barracks at Guantanamo sometimes rode the ships in 10-man detachments, but whenever the FAST Marines were present, the mission of the barracks Marines was simply to provide pier-side security at Guantanamo.⁵⁰

The seagoing Marines faced a unique set of challenges in their work. The experiences of the Marines and Coast Guard crew of the cutter

Tampa (WMEC 902) on one of the later runs from Guantanamo to Port-au-Prince offer a vivid illustration of those challenges. After being embarked at Guantanamo, many of the 96 migrants on board were belligerent; claiming they had been told the destination was Miami, not Port-au-Prince. They went on a hunger strike—a more or less pointless gesture since the trip to Haiti lasted a mere 12 hours. When the ship docked in Port-au-Prince in a light rain around 1100 on 29 April, all the migrants refused to go ashore. As members of the press looked on, one of the women started to scream, as if in great pain. At the same time, the ship's company began to carry the migrants' possessions ashore. At this point, about 65 migrants left the ship to regain their possessions.

Through a linguist attached to the JTF, the ship's officers negotiated with the remaining migrants, who said they would rather die on board the *Tampa* than as victims of the military regime ashore. The negotiations eventually reached an impasse, and the ship's company shifted gears, preparing to use a semblance of force by charging the ship's fire hoses. That threat enabled the Coast Guard crew to escort one of the migrants off the ship. When he cried out to onlookers that they "use force," one of the Haitian policemen on the pier countered ominously, "We have force here, too." But the tension was broken. There was even a ripple of laughter, and the rest of the migrants filed ashore without incident. Two of the migrants went so far as to bend down and kiss the dock. By 1440, the last busload of migrants had left the dockyards.⁵¹

Representatives of the American Embassy at Port-au-Prince who were at the pier later reported that most of the migrants with whom they had spoken said they were glad to be home, and it was only a few malcontents who had caused the trouble. The embassy did not rest at that, and in the coming weeks, looked hard for signs of retribution against the returnees, but found none.⁵²

Simply repatriating the Haitians at Guantanamo did not end the operation. It seemed for every Haitian the Coast Guard deposited on the pier at Port-au-Prince, another set sail, hoping to be picked up by the Coast Guard and be taken to the Navy base in Cuba where they could vie for a chance of becoming a political refugee and going to the United States. If anything, the influx of migrants grew in the spring of 1992, and Camp McCalla often came close to capacity, which was still 12,500, despite repatriations of more than 1,000 migrants per month.



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A Marine talks with Haitian migrants at Camp McCalla. Many Marines were on friendly terms with their charges, but Joint Task Force rules forbade any conduct that went beyond a strictly professional relationship, let alone fraternization.

As time went on, members of the JTF became more adept at running the camp. From interception at sea, through processing and screening, to subsistence and immigration or repatriation, the operation had become largely trouble-free. This was possible because of the solid groundwork laid by General Walls and his troops.⁵³ *

* Water—its sources, use and disposal—was a primary concern for Marine engineers in Operation GTMO. Most of the Haitian migrants had never had such free access to clean, potable water. They bathed in it, washed their clothes in it, and drank it—24 hours a day! This created a challenge in the form of controlling runoff, the “gray water” of soap residue and dirt. The engineers welcomed the arrival of an Air Force “ditch witch,” which enabled the rapid digging of drainage ditches to the edge of the steep cliff, which was Camp McCalla’s western perimeter. From there the water dropped into Guantanamo Bay. An Israeli-made reverse-osmosis purification plant produced all of the water at Guantanamo. The capacity of the plant was large enough for the relatively small numbers of migrants in Operation GTMO. Rationing water was never an issue in 1991, but it was to become a critical issue a few years later. (Maj Theodore R. McKeldin III, Notes on Operation GTMO, Dec00, GTMO/Haiti Collection, MCHC)

Operation GTMO always had been intended as a temporary expedient, not as an alternate means of processing potential immigrants. It occurred to policy makers in Washington that, in at least one sense, the camp at Guantanamo was part of the problem because its very existence appeared to attract many migrants who might otherwise have stayed home. As a result of that view, the Bush administration decided in late May 1992 to try a different approach. By an Executive Order dated 24 May, the President directed the Coast Guard to rescue and repatriate migrants directly to Port-au-Prince without an intermediate stay at Guantanamo.⁵⁴ A few days later, the administration announced it would phase out the tent city on the base to keep from enticing Haitians to flee their homeland.⁵⁵ It seemed the administration had found a solution to the problem through direct repatriation coupled with camp closure, thus removing the incentive for a Haitian to leave home.

The administration’s approach had the desired effect, and the number of migrants at

Guantanamo began to dwindle as no new migrants arrived. All that remained were migrants scheduled for departure, either to return to Haiti or, for the lucky minority, to start a new life in the United States. By 6 June, the number of migrants had fallen to 8,035 and would drop to only 2,003 by 21 June. On 14 June, the joint task force com-

Lejeune worked hard to make Camp McCalla a memory by dismantling and storing tents, wire, and other equipment. Camp McCalla was closed on 10 July.⁵⁶

The number of members assigned to the joint task force continued to shrink as the migrants departed. By 18 August, there were only 268



DVIC DF-ST-99-06023

A group of Haitian migrants stand outside their tent at Camp McCalla. Time appears to hang heavy on them. The French word on the tent flap, "maleur" (usually spelled a little differently), is translated as "unhappiness."

mander distributed the redeployment order. The order called for the dismantling of Camp McCalla and the consolidation of remaining migrants at Camp Bulkeley. When the migrant population dropped close to 1,000, which it did by 30 June, the JTF shifted its flag to Camp Bulkeley and relieved the Marine component of its responsibility for that camp. This freed many Marines to do other work or to return to the United States. Before returning home, Marines from Camp

members of the JTF caring for 293 migrants at Camp Bulkeley. Those 293 Haitians were in legal limbo. Most had been screened and would have been free to travel but for one major obstacle: about 230 of them were HIV-positive. The rest were their family members. Under U.S. law, it was nearly impossible for anyone who was infected with the virus to enter the country.⁵⁷

There followed almost a year of stalemate, with the migrants behind wire at Camp Bulkeley and a



DVIC DN-ST-99-06028

Migrants go about their daily routine at Camp McCalla in the summer of 1992. Many made the best of an increasingly frustrating situation, while others displayed outright anger at their fate.

rump JTF caring for them. A composite Marine MP company from Camp Lejeune provided security at Camp Bulkeley for much of that time. When MP platoons rotated, barracks Marines stepped in for them. The quick reaction force also was dispatched whenever there was a call for reinforcements.* Two Marine officers commanded the JTF during this period, Brigadier General Richard I. Neal, from 22 June to 18 August 1992, and Colonel Lawrence R. Zinser, from 15 December 1992 to 11 March 1993.⁵⁸

In 1992, the quick reaction force deployed several times. The most notable deployments occurred in July and August when violent protests broke out among the migrants who, bored and restless, wanted the U.S. Government to resolve their status one way or the other. Airing concerns at regularly scheduled town meetings failed to relieve tensions. There was, after all, little the JTF could do about policies laid down in Washington. During the disturbance on 17-18 July, the migrants destroyed a fire truck and injured 14 Air

Force security policemen severely enough that they required treatment at the local naval hospital. The injuries were incurred in part because security policemen had exercised so much restraint when facing the migrants.⁵⁹

A month later, on 29 August, there was an even more intense disturbance. This time the migrants burned seven SEAhuts (Southeast Asia huts, a temporary barracks used extensively during the Vietnam War) to call attention to their plight. They got attention, but not the kind they wanted. Once again, as in December 1991, the commanding officer of the Marine Barracks, now Colonel John T. Murray, a bluff Irish-American described by one of his subordinates as a Marine's Marine, organized a task force to restore order. In a scaled-down version of Operation Take Charge, Colonel Murray quickly organized 450 to 500 Marines and sailors into an effective force, which was able to restore order in the camp without a single Haitian or U.S. casualty.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the JTF still had to foot the \$12,500 bill for damage caused by the migrants.⁶¹

In the aftermath of the disturbances, further quality-of-life improvements were instituted to transform the camp into a temporary community. There were upgrades in plumbing and electricity

* Quick reaction forces ranged from squad-sized to whatever size force was needed to contain the situation safely. The forces comprised well-equipped Marines who could deploy within minutes to quell any disturbance.

and migrant participation in the camp's administration was increased. In a related move on 21 September, the JTF closed Camp VII, the segregation facility for malcontents, and opened Camp Bulkeley's gates from 0800 to 2000. There really was nowhere for the migrants to go, but it was a welcome gesture.⁶²

The payoff was that, as the stalemate dragged on into 1993, migrant protests became somewhat less violent. The next protest, which began at 1300 on 29 January after the migrants had conferred with lawyers from the United States, was a hunger strike, which was monitored closely by

medical personnel. The hunger strike lasted through February and into March and attracted the attention of dignitaries like the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson and Rhode Island Senator Claiborne Pell. Jackson vowed to join the hunger strike if the administration did not relent and allow the Haitians to enter the United States. But Congress, which continued to vote by wide margins to ban immigration by anyone who was HIV-positive, tied the administration's hands.⁶³

There followed a variety of peaceful protests, a "break-out" attempt by 10 migrants (who landed in the base brig), and the burning of 12 more



Sketch by Capt Burton E. Moore, Jr., (Marine Corps Art Collection)

A portrayal of Marines and refugees entitled "The Old Gunny is not Pleased!" Combat artist Capt Burton Moore depicted the 29 June 1992 event where Haitians were denied access to one of the holding compound buildings at Camp Bulkeley and the resulting confrontation with known trouble makers.

camp shelters. As lawyers and courts in the U.S. continued to ponder the migrants' fate, the month of May saw another, shorter hunger strike—this one only 12 days—and a rock-throwing incident on 30 May. Events finally turned in the migrants' favor. Some of the migrants entered the United States through various loopholes in the law, and on 8 June a U.S. district judge in New York ruled in favor of allowing the remaining migrants to

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enter the U.S. as parolees.⁶⁴ It was an empty victory for many of the migrants infected with the AIDS virus. Years later, they still had not regularized their status or fit into society. Their relationship with the established Haitian communities in New York and Miami remained ambivalent at best, and they were almost as isolated as they had been at Guantanamo.⁶⁵

Apparently exhausted by the process, the administration did not object, and promised to remove the remaining migrants from Guantanamo within two weeks. Armed with this decree, the JTF lost no time in preparing for its deactivation. By 23 June 1993, the command was down to 60 troops and happy to turn Camp Bulkeley back over to the Navy base. The JTF was formally deactivated and relinquished control of its headquarters facilities in the early morning of 30 June. The last of its members started for home the next day, leaving the most frustrating part of Operation GTMO behind them.⁶⁶ These events coincided with diplomatic initiatives to return President Jean-Bertrand Aristide to power and end the ongoing crisis in Haiti.

At the end of the day, the statistics for Operation GTMO alone told a dramatic story. The JTF had processed more than 30,000 migrants, 10,791 of whom had entered the U.S. while some 23,833 were repatriated to Haiti. The cost of the operation was recorded as \$58,463,000.⁶⁷

What were the implications of Operation GTMO for the Marine Corps? One was straightforward: that migrant operations were not an anomaly, but a mission for the 1990s. General Walls commented this was the kind of mission that only

the military could execute on short notice—with its capability for a quick, orderly, coordinated air and ground response to a humanitarian crisis.⁶⁸ It also called for a degree of force—or at least the threat of force—applied with skill and restraint to preserve order.⁶⁹ While Operation GTMO was something of a departure from the missions of the Cold War, a Marine looking back at the history of the Corps can find many of the elements of Operation GTMO in earlier operations: ambiguous situations—a strange mixture of humanitarian, police, and military operations—that called for creativity, flexibility, and good small unit leadership.

The related conclusion that migrant operations were a harbinger of things to come was evident in the after-action reports. The JTF engineer officer, for example, formally suggested that Marine Corps civil affairs officers design and maintain off-the-shelf plans for the construction of small, medium, and large camps for varying periods of time. Other suggestions stressed the usefulness of military occupational specialties in migrant operations, such as a strong intelligence staff, which a commander needed to monitor the camps, and an independent combat service support organization, as opposed to a smaller logistics section, or J-4, within the joint staff. But perhaps the most important lesson for Marines was “jointness.” No one service could go it alone in migrant operations, and it turned out that jointness was neither as difficult nor unpleasant as some Marines had feared.⁷⁰ Although the JTF was a pick-up team and, as such, had an inherent handicap, many of the Marines who went to Guantanamo Bay had previously worked together at Camp Lejeune. That familiarity allowed them to quickly establish a working infrastructure for the humanitarian operation.

There also was a deep sense of personal satisfaction for Marines who had served in the JTF, many of whom would remember Operation GTMO as one of the highlights of their careers. Marines traditionally respond well to a challenge, especially under the right leadership. The work at Guantanamo was hard and the hours long, but along with the other members of the JTF, the Marines created something out of nothing, and that was very satisfying. Adding to that sense of satisfaction, the accomplishments of the operation were obtained while contributing to a humanitarian cause. Most Marines in Operation GTMO were doing more than just following orders, they were genuinely committed to helping others in need.⁷¹

Chapter 2

Operation Sea Signal

Processing Haitian Migrants off Jamaica

Although Operation GTMO eventually sputtered to an end and its joint task force disbanded, the underlying tensions in the region persisted. The illegal regime in Haiti did not loosen its grip on power despite international pressure, which included an ineffective embargo that continued to make the poor even poorer and more desperate without weakening the wealthy elite the embargo was designed to punish. In July 1993, the United Nations brokered an agreement, known as the Governor's Island Accord, whereby the Haitian military would cede power peacefully to ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. However, little came of the accord after an embarrassing confrontation in October when an advance party of United Nations peacekeepers on board the *Harlan County* (LST 1196) opted not to land at Port-au-Prince in the face of a threatening demonstration. Meanwhile, the Cuban economy continued to deteriorate in step with speculations about Cuban leader Fidel Castro's health and the durability of his regime. These factors provided ample potential for new waves of migrants in the Eastern Caribbean in late 1993 and early 1994.

2d Force Service Support Group (2d FSSG) at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, was, in a sense, the successor organization to JTF GTMO—not only because the cadre of that JTF originated from the unit, but also because a service support group comprised the expertise and resources required for migrant operations. As such, it was logical for 2d FSSG to hold many of the GTMO records and be the institutional memory of the operation. It also made sense that 2d FSSG would be tasked with planning for future joint refugee operations. Under the overall command of U.S. Atlantic Command (USACOM), as Commander in Chief, Atlantic (CinCLANT) was now known, 2d FSSG worked with the Navy base at Guantanamo to prepare and maintain contingency plans for

migrant operations. To that end, a lengthy 7- to 10-day conference was held at Camp Lejeune in early 1994 to discuss potential migrant operations.¹

No Marine was surprised in April 1994 when various commands at Camp Lejeune were warned of a rising tide of Haitian migrants. But the administration's policy was hazy at best, making it impossible to simply pull an operational plan off the shelf and implement it. What did emerge clearly from Washington was a general reluctance to repeat Operation GTMO—that is, to maintain



Department of Defense Photo (USMC)
BGen Michael J. Williams commanded Joint Task Force 160, which in many ways was the successor of Joint Task Force GTMO. Described as a man who was "cool in the hot seat" at Guantanamo, he later attained four-star rank as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps.



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A starboard view of the USNS Comfort (T-AH 20) as it traveled through the Panama Canal. In 1994, the hospital ship was pressed into service to assist as a screening platform for Haitian migrants. The ship's profile reflects its original design as a tanker.

refugee camps surrounded by barbed wire on an American base. The goal was to avoid the lengthy stalemate JTF GTMO experienced when faced with HIV-positive Haitians, not to mention the bad press from photos of heavily armed Marines and soldiers confronting angry migrants across billowing rolls of concertina wire. As the tide of new migrants began to flow, the procedure was to keep them moving in an orderly fashion, either to the U.S. or back to Haiti, but not to pitch camp.²

In April and May, the outlines of the operation began to emerge. By mid-May, U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Atlantic, had issued a kind of warning order to Headquarters II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) at Camp Lejeune stating that, like his predecessor, President William J. Clinton had decided that "genuine Haitian refugees fleeing by boat ... [would] not be directly returned to Haiti." Instead, the migrants would be screened at "a facility in the region" or "on vessels anchored off shore." The exact location would depend on the outcome of diplomatic initiatives.³

Even before the plan took final shape, Atlantic Command directed II MEF to provide a joint task

force commander and a Marine component for the nascent Joint Task Force 160 (JTF 160). On 24 May 1994, then Brigadier General Michael J. Williams became commander, JTF 160, and Lieutenant Colonel (colonel select) Douglas C. Redlich became commander, Marine Forces 160 (MarFor 160). Under his command was Lieutenant Colonel John R. Allen, the head of 2d Battalion, 4th Marines. JTF 160 soon received a set of "be prepared to" missions, which included providing shipboard security for migrant processing, establishing a facility for migrant processing on Grand Turk Island, and maintaining a presence at Guantanamo to support such initiatives. By early June, elements of JTF 160 were on the ground or on ships somewhere in the theater.⁴

Like General Walls before him, General Williams was a fortuitous choice. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, he was a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy who became a Naval Aviator and was to become Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps. He brought to the job a combination of compassion, common sense, and determination. A story about the general and the operation in *People* magazine was aptly titled "Cool in



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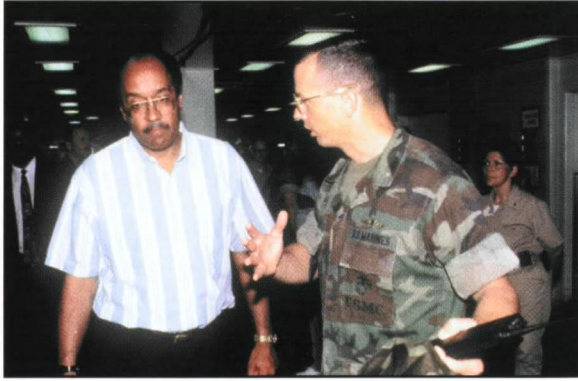
An aerial view of the Windward Piers at Guantanamo Bay showing the chartered vessels Mediterranean Sky (left) and Ivan Franko. A former Russian troopship, the Ivan Franko was soon known among Marines as a dirty, substandard option for billeting.

overloaded, would wait on the Ukrainian cruise ship *Gruziya*, which the JTF had leased for the operation at a cost of \$30,000 per day. *Gruziya* was a well-run ship, accustomed to meeting the demands of European and American passengers. She would have served the JTF well, but her contract expired before the JTF began to operate, and her successor, the *Ivan Franko*, would prove to be much less capable of meeting the demands of the operation. A company of Marines from 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, and the battalion's battle staff, including Lieutenant Colonel Allen, would be on the ships to maintain order.⁶ *

There was nothing wrong with the operational concept. It was straightforward and fit the mission. But there were flaws in the details and the execution, and those flaws became apparent soon after the first migrants arrived on board the *Comfort* on 16 June. The assumption was that 500

migrants could be processed each day, a number that proved wildly optimistic. The ship was configured for handling trauma patients rather than for diagnosing infectious diseases, from which many of the Haitians suffered. Medical personnel had to screen for diseases such as tuberculosis, and the limited number of x-ray machines created a bottleneck. Another problem was finding a place on the ship to house patients with infectious respiratory ailments. The ship's self-contained heating, ventilation and air conditioning system made it difficult to isolate air-borne infections. In fact, the very nature of the ventilation system made it highly probable that air-borne infections would spread throughout the ship. It was a no-win situation: migrants had to be taken below deck to be examined for respiratory infections. Once there, the mere act of breathing could put any infection into the circulated air of the ventilation system and rapidly spread it throughout the ship. Eventually, someone found a portable x-ray machine that worked outdoors. The machine was set up on the flight deck and put to work under less than optimal conditions.⁷

* Maj John L. Shissler III noted that American intelligence tracked the movements of the *Ivan Franko* to see where the Soviets might be sending troops. It was one of the ironies of the post-Cold War period that she was now "on our side." (Shissler intvw)



DVIC DM-ST-97-01595

LtCol John R. Allen, commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, gives a guided tour of the Comfort to special presidential envoy to Haiti, the Honorable William Gray. The tour demonstrated the route a Haitian migrant would take when delivered for screening.

There were related problems of disposing potentially infectious human waste, and of producing enough fresh water to accommodate both the migrants and the members of the JTF. General Williams entered a virtual catalogue of problems in his diary, starting with the observation that

“[n]othing maritime is easy.” He noted that sheltered anchorages for super tankers and large ships like the *Comfort* pose unique difficulties for the types of small craft needed to ferry migrants to and from their destinations; big ships and little boats did not mix well. To further complicate matters, the same anchorages typically did not have the same services as regular ports, which usually offer services such as water taxis, barges, sewer and water connections, and floating supplies.⁸

As a result, migrant camps sprouted on the *Comfort*'s weather decks, principally the helicopter pad. Using a hodgepodge of crates, pallets, tents, camouflage netting, and portable toilets, the task force erected shelters for the migrants. A special enclosure was erected to house migrants showing signs of tuberculosis, 12 percent of the total population. The enclosure was surrounded by ad hoc nylon fencing and guarded by a Marine who stood upwind from the migrants and warned anyone who approached of the potential danger. Temporary communities took shape and leaders emerged. To Allen, it looked like the infamous Civil War prison camp at Andersonville. But he and the Haitians made it work.⁹



Photo courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen

A tent camp for Haitian migrants was set up on the helicopter flight deck of the Comfort. It was a hot, austere, and boring place.



Photo courtesy of LtCol John R. Allen

The 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, provided meal service on the flight deck of the Comfort. The individual serving the meal is himself a migrant who volunteered to assist the Marines.

A studious Marine who had first made a name for himself commanding the rigorous Infantry Officer's Course at Quantico, Virginia, Allen was a devotee of the Marine Corps' *Small Wars Manual*, a guidebook written earlier in the century for small unit leaders in the jungles of Central America facing unusual challenges ranging from civil unrest to guerrilla warfare. The manual was based on the assumption that small wars "are conceived in uncertainty, [and] ... demand the highest type of leadership directed by intelligence, resourcefulness, and ingenuity." That concept helped Colonel Allen recognize the value of working with the migrant community leaders. When he appeared on deck, he would make a point of showing respect for the leaders by sitting and eating with them in their communities. Lieutenant Colonel Allen also ensured the Marines shared some of the hardships with the migrants. For example, Marines maintained a presence

among the migrants during the heat of the day, which was intensified by the steel deck, and during the routine tropical downpours.¹⁰

There were additional unusual challenges. One being the *Ivan Franko*, the only option for housing some of the Marines along with migrants who had been screened-out, was a filthy former Soviet troopship. Everyone on the *Ivan Franko* lived in fetid squalor under far worse conditions than existed on the *Comfort*.¹¹

In late June, accusations of murder on the high seas began to surface. The story, which unfolded bit by bit, involved a boat filled with Haitians who, like many others, hoped to get to Florida. During the voyage, food supplies—mainly flour mixed with seawater—on the boat dwindled and a gang of migrants took it upon themselves to reduce the number of people on board. One woman reported the men tried to throw her husband overboard. When she resisted, crying des-

perately, the gang moved on in search of another victim. Another man, who was from a different village than most of the other migrants on the boat, reported he had kept a low profile to avoid the gang. All told, the gang allegedly murdered seven migrants. With the help of military lawyers, eight suspects were identified and confined until late July. The JTF ultimately sent the suspects back to Haiti for trial under the laws of that nation on the grounds the murders had occurred on a Haitian vessel.¹² *

In early July, the 2d Marine Division took steps to limit the potential for violence at sea, at least on board U.S. ships. The division began by deploying small detachments of Marines to Navy and Coast Guard ships to provide security during Operations Able Manner and Able Vigil, the code-names for the interdiction of migrants at sea, which lasted through August.¹³

As the operation continued, it became clear the Jamaican option was not working. There were simply too many Haitians. JTF 160 already had made the decision to send some migrants directly to Guantanamo, even before screening, when the lines on the *Comfort* were too long. At about the same time, the Clinton administration concluded the policy of rescuing and interviewing migrants was apparently encouraging Haitians to become sea-borne migrants. As such, the policy was abruptly changed to stem the flow of migrants, just as the Bush administration had done a few years earlier. The new policy stated that migrants

rescued at sea could opt either for return to Haiti (where they could, in theory, apply for a visa at the American Embassy) or go to a "safe haven," not further defined but supposedly a refuge of some sort outside Haiti. Migrants would be allowed to stay at the safe haven as long as the Cedras regime persisted.¹⁴

Faced with the new policy and the continuing flow of migrants, General Williams decided not to receive any new migrants on the *Comfort*, and on 6 July he moved his flag to Guantanamo, where he had to deal with 108 would-be illegal Chinese immigrants. The Chinese migrants had been caught in the Coast Guard's nets and briefly put in the JTF's charge, a bizarre additional burden for the already harried task force.¹⁵

Joint Task Force 160 began to flow resources only to Guantanamo, and not to Jamaica. Once the Coast Guard ships and C-130 aircraft stopped transporting migrants to Jamaica, everyone in the JTF was ready for the *Comfort* to raise anchor, sail to Guantanamo, and unload its migrants at the

* When a cutter with migrants arrived alongside the *Comfort*, the typical routine was for Luis A. Moreno, an officer with the U.S. State Department, and LtCol Allen to board. Speaking through an interpreter, they would brief the migrants, who tended to be buoyant and hopeful and often cheered as Moreno and LtCol Allen outlined the routine on the *Comfort*. But the mood was noticeably subdued on one of the cutters, prompting Moreno and LtCol Allen to ask for an explanation. The interpreter already had heard parts of the story and told the colonel one migrant boat had been overcrowded and some of the men had decided to throw "excess" migrants overboard. At one point, the interpreter gestured to a woman sitting alone in the helicopter shelter on the flight deck clutching her baby and rocking back and forth. "She was next," he said. LtCol Allen asked the interpreter if he knew who the perpetrators were, and when he said yes, LtCol Allen called for the reaction force, which was waiting on the *Comfort*. Dressed in helmets, body armor, and riot gear, the force came streaming onto the cutter. After briefing the noncommissioned officer in charge of the detail, LtCol Allen pointed out the first suspect and the Marines laid hands on him. The effect was electric. The previously subdued migrants leaped to their feet, pointed to the others the interpreter had named and began cheering when they were led away. (LtCol John R. Allen memo to author, 5Mar00, hereafter Allen Memorandum)



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A corporal from Company G, 2d Battalion, 4th Marines, carries a young Haitian migrant off the Comfort. The child was one of the last migrants to leave the ship.



DVIC DM-ST-98-02126

A Navy chief warrant officer, who was a Deployed Mass Population Identification and Tracking System (DMPITS) expert, checks rosters received from the Comfort as migrants shift to the control of Joint Task Force 160 ashore. The system was a vital component of JTF operations. Having evolved since Operation GTMO, it produced the databases and the plastic bracelets, which enabled the JTF to track individual migrants.

Navy base. However, the Jamaican government said the *Comfort* could not leave Jamaican waters because the U.S. Government committed to use Jamaican facilities for a specific purpose and period of time. The State Department was nervous about offending Jamaican sensibilities and was slow to resolve the deadlock. This made the situation on the *Comfort* very difficult because it left approximately 1,000 Haitians marooned on the ship, and the longer the deadlock dragged on, the angrier the migrants became.¹⁶

Lieutenant Colonel Allen soon had a riot on his hands. One very hot day around noon he was summoned to the flight deck to find two files of Marines in full riot gear facing an unruly crowd. Four Marines reinforced them with shotguns waiting in reserve. Two Haitians were delivering heated speeches to the group. Using the proven technique of separating the leaders from the crowd, Allen ordered his Marines to “snatch” the troublemakers. A burly 220-pound body builder stepped forward, put one of the troublemakers in a bear

hug, and wrestled him to the steel deck. The Marines then scuttled him out of sight.¹⁷

The action sent a shock wave through the crowd. Not only did it deprive them of their leader, but it sent a message the Marines meant business. In response, many of the Haitians simply fell to the deck and cried in frustration. Nothing they tried seemed to work. Allen followed up with a humanitarian “combined arms” team made up of psychological warfare specialists, chaplains, and civil affairs officers, all of whom helped to contain the situation.¹⁸ *

* Since there is no easy Haitian translation for “Marine,” members of Joint Task Force 160 originally used the French word for soldier when addressing the Haitian migrants. But the Haitians did not understand exactly who the Marines were, so the U.S. servicemen switched to the word “Marine” itself, and the migrants reacted with respect. They remembered the Marine constabulary, which had policed Haiti some 60 years earlier. Soon, all migrants knew it was Marines who rode the “the ghost ship,” as they called the white-painted *Comfort*. (Allen intvw)