

FORCE PROJECTION, THE 5TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY
BRIGADE, AND THE PLANNED AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT
DURING THE 1962 CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

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TIMOTHY R. NEWKIRK, MAJOR, U.S. MARINE CORPS
B.S., Embry Riddle Aeronautical University, Daytona Beach, Florida, 2001
M.A., Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont, 2008

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas
2016

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Name of Candidate: Maj Timothy R. Newkirk

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Approved by:

_____, Thesis Committee Chair
Wilburn E. Meador, M.A.

_____, Member
Alexander M. Bielakowski, Ph.D.

_____, Member
Jeffrey D. Vordermark, M.A.

Accepted this 10th day of June 2016 by:

_____, Director, Graduate Degree Programs
Robert F. Baumann, Ph.D.

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ABSTRACT

FORCE PROJECTION, THE 5TH MARINE EXPEDITIONARY BRIGADE, AND THE PLANNED AMPHIBIOUS ASSAULT DURING THE 1962 CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS, by Maj Timothy R. Newkirk, 147pages.

When the Cuban Missile Crisis began on 15 October 1962, the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB), based out of Camp Pendleton, California, was in an inactive status, having just one officer and nine enlisted men permanently assigned as the cadre. As a part of the Marine Corps' forces allocated to support the Atlantic Command's Cuban Contingency Plans, the 5th MEB headquarters was activated on 20 October 1962 in preparation for possible deployment. Shortly thereafter on 23 October, the entire brigade was activated, ordered to embark all its equipment and 11,000 personnel on naval amphibious shipping, and set sail for the Caribbean within ninety-six hours. This paper explores the challenges, shortfalls, and successes the brigade experienced while mobilizing and deploying on such a short timeline for expected amphibious and combat operations. Additionally, a brief history regarding the development of the Cuban invasion plans is reviewed with special emphasis on the role of the 5th MEB in those plans and what lessons a staff planner can take away from the development of operational plans and the actual mount-out that occurred.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE THESIS APPROVAL PAGE	iii
ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vi
ACRONYMS.....	viii
ILLUSTRATIONS	x
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
Introduction and Background	1
Literature Review	5
Thesis Organization	8
CHAPTER 2 CONTEXT: THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	10
CHAPTER 3 GETTING OUT THE DOOR: INCREASED READINESS, EMBARKATION AND INITIAL DEPLOYMENT.....	30
The Case for Concrete Intelligence	30
5th MEB Planning Concerns	34
Launch the Ready BLT	40
Activation of the 5th MEB.....	45
CHAPTER 4 READY FOR WAR: INVASION PLANS AND THE PROLONGED ALERT	65
Evolution of the Cuban Contingency Plans	65
Readying to Attack	84
Command Relationships	88
Forces Available and Assigned Objectives	96
Options for Employment of the 5th MEB	106
CHAPTER 5 AFTERMATH: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND SIGNIFICANCE	115
On Planning and Execution Shortfalls.....	115
On Deterrence Theory	124

On Rapid Force Projection: Korea, Cuba, and Today	125
Takeaways for Operational Level Staff Planners	129
APPENDIX A CHAIN OF COMMAND AND KEY PERSONNEL DURING THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS.....	131
BIBLIOGRAPHY	132

ACRONYMS

AFLANT	Air Force Component, Atlantic Command
AIRFMFPAC	Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific
ARLANT	Army Component, Atlantic Command
BLT	Battalion Landing Team
CG	Commanding General
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CINCAFLANT	Commander-in-Chief, Air Force Component, Atlantic
CINCARLANT	Commander-in-Chief, Army Component, Atlantic
CINCLANT	Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Command (Unified Combatant Command)
CINCLANTFLT	Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet
CINCPACFLT	Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet
CJTF	Commander, Joint Task Force
COMMATS	Commander, Military Air Transit Service
COMPHIBGRU	Commander, Amphibious Group
COMPHIBLANT	Commander, Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet
COMPHIBPAC	Commander, Amphibious Forces, Pacific Fleet
COMSECONDFLT	Commander, U.S. Second Fleet
CONARC	Continental Army Command
FMFLANT	Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic
FMFPAC	Fleet Marine Force, Pacific
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JTF	Joint Task Force

KGB	<i>Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti</i>
LST	Landing Ship, Tank
MARDIV	Marine Division
MATS	Military Air Transit Service
MCAS	Marine Corps Air Station
MEB	Marine Expeditionary Brigade
MEF	Marine Expeditionary Force
MSTS	Military Sea Transportation Service
OPLAN	Operation Plan
PHIBGRU	Amphibious Group
PHIBRIGLEX	Amphibious Brigade Landing Exercise
PHIBRON	Amphibious Squadron
POE	Port of Embarkation
RLT	Regimental Landing Team
SAM	Surface-to-air Missile
STRAC OPLAN	Standards in Training Commission Operational Plan
STRICOM	U.S. Strike Command
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TF	Task Force

ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Figure 1. Missile Activity in Cuba, September 1962	32
Figure 2. OPLAN 316-62 Command Relations for Initial Operations (Pre-assault)	89
Figure 3. Joint Zone Cuba: OPLAN 316-62 Operating Areas	91
Figure 4. Airborne Assault Area and Amphibious Objective Area, Western Cuba	92
Figure 5. Command Relations for Operations Ashore Prior to Establishment of JTF Cuba	93
Figure 6. Command Relations Once JTF Cuba is Established	94
Figure 7. Major Subordinate Units of TF 123	98
Figure 8. Operations Overlay and Major Objectives for CINCLANT OPLAN 316-63	101

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Introduction and Background

It has been 53 years since the Cuban Missile Crisis, and still historians, policymakers, and political scientists continue to examine and scrutinize the event for its diplomatic relevance and political implications.¹ Even as recently as September 2015, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) released approximately 2,500 previously classified President's Daily Briefs from the John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson administrations, including President's Daily Briefs during the missile crisis.²

As with most modern history, the initial works regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis during the decades that followed the event consisted mainly of insider accounts (such as Raymond L. Garthoff's *Reflections on the Cuban Missile Crisis*), memoirs (such as Robert F. Kennedy's *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*), and press compilations. In the 1980s, the U.S. government and its agencies began the slow process of declassifying and releasing documents relating to the event, and the era produced a new wave of analysis, books, and papers. In the late 1980s, some Soviet archives and documents also began to appear publicly, and after the fall of the Soviet Union, even more documents began to emerge slowly from former Soviet institutions like the Foreign

¹ See the recent article from Graham Allison, "The Cuban Missile Crisis at 50: Lessons for U.S. Foreign Policy Today," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 4 (July 2013): 6-11.

² Central Intelligence Agency, "The Collection of Presidential Briefing Products from 1961 to 1969," accessed 27 September 2015, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/collection/PDBs>.

Ministry, the Ministry of Defense, and the Ministry for State Security, better known in the West as the *Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti* (KGB). Although these documents and archives provide historians and scholars even greater access to the Soviet perspective of the crisis, the level of access falls far short of the transparency Americans are used to seeing and there still remains plenty of information not available to the public. Yet, even with the patchy work that has become available from the Soviet perspective, scholars have been able to conduct even more enquiries into the crisis and have been able to provide an even greater understanding of the conflict to the public.³

Nevertheless, with all the written documentation and analysis on the Cuban Missile Crisis available publicly—enough to likely fill several rooms full of bookcases—there has not been a tremendous amount of study and literature published below the national and strategic levels, nor much significant analysis beyond the decisions and actions taken by the three nations’ leaders and their staffs involved in the crisis at that time. Indeed, there is no shortage of published material on the subject at the national level. The preponderance of material at the operational level for the military (at and below the combatant commands, for instance), are held at various archive locations across the country with minimal analysis and publication of these documents and histories.

With all this analysis at the national level, the predominant American narrative of the event has been dominated by the viewpoint that the United States and President John

³ James G. Blight and David A. Welch, “What can Intelligence tell us about the Cuban Missile Crisis, and what can the Cuban Missile Crisis tell us about Intelligence?” *Intelligence and National Security: Special Issue on Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 3-4.

F. Kennedy forced the Soviet Union and Premier Nikita Khrushchev to back down. This viewpoint is fueled and characterized by such comments as former Secretary of State Dean Rusk's "We're eyeball to eyeball, and I think the other fellow just blinked."⁴ In actuality, the settlement of the crisis included Kennedy's public pledge not to invade Cuba, as well as the secret plan to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey and Italy five months later. Contrary to popular belief, Kennedy was prepared to make further concessions if Khrushchev did not accept the aforementioned offer.⁵ This crisis was not simply a president standing tall, drawing a line in the sand and an adversary backing down. The more the event is studied, the more complex the situation appears to have been.

For instance, it is known today that, in addition to the numerous medium- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles discovered by U-2 reconnaissance flights on 14 October 1962 and thereafter, there were actually already over 100 tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba at the time. On top of those 100-plus tactical nuclear weapons in Cuba, the Soviet submarines operating in the area were carrying nuclear-armed torpedoes.⁶ The

⁴ Thomas Blanton, "Annals of Blinksmanship," *The Wilson Quarterly* (Summer 1997), National Security Archive, accessed 6 October 2015, http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/nsa/cuba_mis_cri/annals.htm.

⁵ Raymond L. Garthoff, "Soviet Actions and Reactions in the Cuban Missile Crisis," Naval Heritage and History Command, 13 May 2014, accessed 25 September 2015, <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/publications/colloquium-on-contemporary-history/a-new-look-at-the-cuban-missile-crisis/soviet-actions-reactions-cuban-missile-crisis.html>.

⁶ Raymond L. Garthoff, "U.S. Intelligence in the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Intelligence and National Security: Special Issue on Intelligence and the Cuban Missile Crisis* 13, no. 3 (Autumn 1998): 30.

U.S. intelligence agencies at the time were unaware that those types of weapons were in and around Cuba, nor did U.S. intelligence agencies suspect it. On 22 October 1962, U.S. intelligence estimated the Soviet ground contingent on Cuba to be around 10,000 troops acting primarily in advisor and technician roles.⁷ In fact, as it is known today, the Soviet force on Cuba numbered closer to 42,000 combat troops that included air forces, air defense, coastal defense, and ground combat forces, as well as the aforementioned nuclear weapons.⁸

It is now clear that the U.S. intelligence estimates regarding Soviet and Cuban military capabilities were woefully inadequate. The failure to recognize the deployment of missiles to Cuba and the major build-up of Soviet military personnel and equipment on the island draws the most criticism.⁹ This paper, however, does not attempt to reconcile the actions of the U.S. military forces made in 1962 based on the facts as known today, but rather to review those actions taken at the time more from the perspective of the participants and the information available to them then. As just highlighted, the abundance of information and inquiry into the event has been focused at the national and strategic level of major players in the conflict: the United States, the Soviet Union, and to a lesser extent, Cuba. Scrutinizing presidential decision-making, identifying the shortfalls of the intelligence community, or attempting to understand why Khrushchev agreed to place nuclear missiles are common approaches to the event.

⁷ Garthoff, "U.S. Intelligence in the Cuban Missile Crisis," 28.

⁸ Ibid., 29.

⁹ Ibid., 22.

Meanwhile, there has not been significant interest in studying the planning, preparation, or events that took place below the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and combatant command levels. This project seeks to explore some of that void. Specifically, this study seeks to review the capability—both perceived and actual—of the U.S. military to conduct an amphibious assault and invasion of Cuba during the crisis and the implications that this power projection capability had on the conflict. The primary focus of this project centers on the mobilization of the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) in preparation for the invasion; the capabilities and capacity of the brigade to successfully embark, deploy, and its readiness for combat operations; as well as a review and analysis of the broader U.S. invasion plans at that time. Additionally, a brief look at what the Soviets thought the United States was capable of accomplishing regarding an amphibious assault will provide insight into the effect that capability had on resolving the conflict without engaging in lethal combat. Supporting this focus is additional review of the strategic and operational environment that existed during the crisis and, ultimately, a discussion of the aftermath and takeaways that can be gleaned from the alert and mobilization of military forces during the crisis.

Literature Review

As mentioned previously, there is no shortage of material regarding the Cuban Missile Crisis. Additionally, the immense amount of primary source material ranging from battalion-level tactical plans to documents of the highest classification at the national level provides an abundance of information for any budding scholar to analyze. Meanwhile, there are just a handful of authors who have examined the military's role in

the crisis and even fewer who have published works regarding the planned military invasion of Cuba in 1962.

Works regarding the response by the larger military organizations, such as the JCS and the Department of Defense, include Adam Yarmolinsky's report on *Department of Defense Operations During the Cuban Crisis*, Jonathan M. House's *Joint Operational Problems in the Cuban Missile Crisis*, excerpts from Robert W. Love's *History of the U.S. Navy*, and passages from Walter S. Poole's *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: Volume VIII 1961-1964*. More recently in 2006, Norman Polmar's and John D. Gresham's *DEFCON-2: Standing on the Brink of Nuclear War during the Cuban Missile Crisis* offers a complete and thorough account of the Crisis, with Tom Clancy declaring the book, "Probably the best popular account of the confrontation of 1962 that we will ever have."¹⁰ This impressive and detailed account generally remains at the strategic level, delving briefly into a broad review of the invasion plans and the composition of the Cuban defenders within a single chapter containing 12 pages.

Other authors who attempted to tackle broader aspects of the planned invasion and operational response of the military include John M. Young's *When the Russians Blink: The U.S. Maritime Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis*, Manual E. Falcon's *Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis: Presidential Decision-making and its Effect on Military Employment During the Kennedy Administration*, and Blaine L. Pardoe's *Fires of October: The Planned U.S. Invasion of Cuba During the Missile Crisis of 1962*.

¹⁰ Norman Polmar and John D. Gresham, *DEFCON-2: Standing on the Brink of Nuclear War during the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2006), xi.

Young in 1990 and Pardoe in 2013 had both done extraordinary jobs at gathering, summarizing, and presenting information from primary (archival) source documents and provided a great central point of reference for the facts and summaries of the military's operational picture during the crisis. In fact, Pardoe, in *Fires of October*, referred to Young's book numerous times in regards to the Navy and Marine Corps actions surrounding the planned invasion. Pardoe spent several years researching and compiling data, as well as submitting Freedom of Information Act requests in his efforts to obtain still-classified documents, and created an impressive volume on the planned Cuban invasion that utilized a wide array of sources.¹¹

Pardoe's overarching theme in *Fires of October* was to create and experience the invasion of Cuba as if it actually happened. Moreover, he sought to reconstruct this event—the potential invasion—based on all the facts that are available today. The foundation of Pardoe's book might be summarized as his attempt to answer the follow question, If the U.S. had in fact invaded Cuba, what would have happened? His intent was to put the reader, as he states, “on the ground in Cuba to experience events that were forestalled through diplomacy and pure luck.”¹² Pardoe's work was essentially a presentation of the facts on the planned invasion, with limited examination of the actions taken and briefly probing some of the “what if's,” that may have occurred. As indicated, he did spend considerable effort trying to extrapolate how events would have played out on the island had the invasion actually occurred. The lack of analysis on the preparations

¹¹ Blaine L. Pardoe, *Fires of October: The Planned Invasion of Cuba During the Missile Crisis of 1962* (England: Fonthill Media, 2013), 11-13.

¹² *Ibid.*, 13.

made to conduct the invasion and the effect those preparations had on the crisis outcome is what this study will seek to fill—a more complete and focused analysis of the preparation of invasion plans and the projection of those military forces in order to conduct the invasion.

Young's thesis from 1989 focused on the military's response and actions during the crisis, as documented by the major commands, and mainly reviews the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps actions. Although he briefly discussed the probable effect of the invasion's preparations and the naval quarantine on Russian leaders, his book did not explore this concept in much depth.¹³ Nonetheless, given the nature of the world when Young produced his book—the Cold War remained ongoing and very limited classified documents had been released up to that point—it was and remains today an astonishing compilation and account of the military's role and response during the crisis. Capitalizing on classified information that has been released since the publication of *When the Russians Blinked* in 1990, this thesis will expand on Young's reflection regarding the impact of the invasion plans and amphibious assault capabilities on President Kennedy's options and Premier Khrushchev's decision to remove the missiles as well as explore the actions of the 5th MEB in much greater depth.

Thesis Organization

Following the introduction chapter, chapter 2 will establish the context for the Cuban Missile Crisis. It begins with a brief history of Cuba from the establishment of the

¹³ John M. Young, "When the Russians Blinked: The U.S. Maritime Response to the Cuban Missile Crisis" (Master's Thesis, The University of Tulsa, Tulsa, OK, 1989), 167-184.

Monroe Doctrine (circa 1823), to the Spanish-American War (1898) and up to the rise of Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution (1959). Next, the strategic situation and tension between the United States and the Soviet Union at the time of President John F. Kennedy's election will be established. Uneasiness in the United States about communism appearing just 90 miles away in Cuba had an influence on Kennedy's decision to move forward with the Bay of Pigs invasion. Following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, a review of Kennedy's changes to senior military leadership will be examined. Lastly, this thesis looks at how the Department of Defense was organized to fight and how the Marine Corps fit into the Unified Command structure at the time.

Having established the strategic and operational context for the crisis, chapter 3 will focus on the preparation for the deployment to invade and the actions taken in response to crisis by the Headquarters, Fleet Marine Forces Atlantic (FMFLANT), II Marine Expeditionary Force (II MEF) and the 5th MEB; as well as a review and analyze those actions. Chapter 4 will explore the evolution of the Cuban Contingency Plans and will examine the details of the plans as they stood at height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, mainly relating to the plans for the 5th MEB. Lastly, chapter 5 will summarize the analysis of the paper and examine the significance of the military's preparedness to execute the contingency plans during the crisis, and ultimately, what the implications of those demonstrated capabilities had on the outcome of the crisis.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT: THE STRATEGIC AND OPERATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

To help understand the decisions, events, and actions of American military forces during the Cuban Missile Crisis and narrow the scope of analysis to the operational level, the historical context and strategic setting should be established and more clearly defined. This historical look begins with the Monroe Doctrine, moves to the Spanish-American War, and continues up to the Cuban Revolution, which brought Fidel Castro to power. Following the historical review, the strategic environment is established and the stage is set for action on 1 October 1962.

So, what was the Monroe Doctrine and what does it have to do with the Cuba Missile Crisis? During a news conference on 29 August 1962, President Kennedy responded to a question from a reporter inquiring about the Monroe Doctrine and what it meant to Cuba. The President responded,

The Monroe Doctrine means what it has meant since President Monroe and John Quincy Adams enunciated it, and that is that we would oppose a foreign power extending its power to the Western Hemisphere. And that's why we oppose what is being—what's happening in Cuba today. That's why we have cut off our trade. That's why we worked in the OAS [Organization of American States] and in other ways to isolate the Communist menace in Cuba.¹⁴

Born out of the events of the early 19th century (the War of 1812, the retreat of Spain from its colonies a few years later, and the Napoleonic Wars in Europe, to name a few), the Monroe Doctrine was a U.S. foreign policy encompassed in a message to Congress by

¹⁴ John F. Kennedy: “The President’s News Conference, August 29, 1962,” The American Presidency Project, accessed 16 October 2015, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=8839>.

President James Monroe on 2 December 1823. Monroe declared that the United States would not interfere with any existing colonies in the Americas. However, the United States would not permit any new or re-colonization by Europe and that “any attempt . . . to extend their [monarchical] system to the [Western] hemisphere” was a threat to the peace and safety of the United States.¹⁵ Essentially, Monroe had just drawn a line in the sand that the United States intended to resist any meddling in the affairs of the Americas by European powers.

Numerous presidents since have tended only to invoke the Monroe Doctrine when it suited national policy and interests. In 1898, President William McKinley intervened in the Spanish-Cuban conflict, and in a manner consistent with the Monroe Doctrine, aimed at expelling Spain from the Caribbean. In what is now referred to as the Spanish-American War, the United States defeated Spain in just three months of fighting. With that victory, the United States acquired Cuba, as well as the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Guam from Spain. Cuba became one of first of many U.S. protectorates in the Caribbean and Latin America. Over the decades that would follow, U.S. policy toward Cuba would fluctuate between heavy-handed coercion to a hands-off approach.¹⁶

To manage and control Cuba (and protect U.S. interests) while still respecting the freedom and independence of the Cuban people to self-govern, the Congress passed the Platt Amendment in 1901. This amendment outlined the powers granted to Cuba as a protectorate, limiting the Cuban government from engaging in foreign affairs without the

¹⁵ Mark T. Gilderhus, “The Monroe Doctrine: Meanings and Implications,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36, no. 1 (March 2006): 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

consent of the United States, preserving the right of the United States to intervene in Cuba to ensure independence, and ceding Guantanamo Bay to the United States as a naval base.¹⁷

Facing either limited independence under the Platt Amendment or no independence by rejecting it, the Cuban Constitutional Convention would include the Platt Amendment word for word in the Cuban Constitution. On 20 May 1902, with the passing of the constitution, the official occupation by the United States of the Republic of Cuba ended.¹⁸ The Platt Amendment and follow-on economic policy of the United States regarding Cuba became a catalyst for transformation on the island in the years that followed the Spanish-American War up through World War II. The United States would loan money to Cuba for development and to facilitate the ability of U.S. surpluses to be exported and sold abroad. Along with investments came a not so subtle strong-arming of the Cuban government to insure those loans could be repaid. This heavy hand by the United States caused a continuous rise in anti-American sentiment on the island and would ultimately lead to the United States acquiescing to Cuban nationalist desires and the nullification of the Platt Amendment in May of 1934.¹⁹

Replaced by the Treaty of Relations in 1935 between the United States and Cuba, the new agreement meant the United States would no longer intervene in the affairs of

¹⁷ Ann-Marie Holmes, “The United States and Cuba: 1898-1959” (Master’s Thesis, Hawai’i Pacific University, Honolulu, HI, 22 October 2009), 20-21.

¹⁸ Ibid., 22.

¹⁹ Young, 10.

Cuban politics.²⁰ Fulgencio Batista, a dominant revolutionary and political figure in Cuba prior to the Treaty of Relations, became Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army in 1933.²¹ Batista was elected as president in 1940. Although Batista retired shortly after World War II to Miami, he would return to Cuba in 1952 and lead a military coup to seize power from Cuban President Carlos Socarrás. With Batista supported and recognized by the U.S. government, a reign of corruption and inept governance in dealing with a smoldering insurgency grew.²²

Fidel Castro, leading guerilla forces for several years against the Batista regime, seized power as Batista fled the island on 1 January 1960.²³ Castro held no elections and organized the country using communist ideologies.²⁴ President Dwight D. Eisenhower was initially conciliatory toward the new Castro regime and publicly recognized the sovereign rights of Cuba. The peaceful atmosphere lasted just a few weeks, as Castro continued to provoke the United States and the Soviets began to make diplomatic inroads on the island.²⁵ In his last year as president, Eisenhower was forced to confront a communist threat to the United States just 90 miles from its doorstep.

²⁰ Holmes, 49.

²¹ Ibid., 43.

²² Ibid., 54-58.

²³ Ibid., 81-82.

²⁴ Young, 11.

²⁵ Manuel E. Falcon, "Bay of Pigs and Cuban Missile Crisis: Presidential Decision-making and its Effect on Military Employment during the Kennedy Administration" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1993), 20-21.

The Soviet Union quickly began nurturing the fledgling communist government in Cuba with Soviet Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan visiting Castro in February 1960. As hostilities between Cuba and the United States quickly escalated, Soviet Premier Khrushchev added fuel to the fire in May 1960 insinuating that the “Monroe Doctrine ‘has died a natural death’ and should be interred as a stinking corpse,” and declaring that the Soviet Union would respond to any “American aggression” against Cuba.²⁶

As the Eisenhower administration was beginning to develop covert plans to deal with the “Cuban problem,” John F. Kennedy was out on the campaign trail in his bid to become the 35th President of the United States. Kennedy was markedly critical of the Eisenhower administration for failing to keep up with the Soviets regarding the development of space technology and hit hard on the perceived missile gap that existed with the Soviet Union. Kennedy, implying that Eisenhower’s soft policies on Cuba had allowed the Soviets to gain a toehold in the Western Hemisphere, promised to be more active in Cuba and forceful regarding the removal of Fidel Castro. As described by David Detzer in his 1979 book *The Brink*, Kennedy stated while campaigning in the Midwest, “Those who say they will stand up to Mr. Khrushchev have demonstrated no ability to stand up to Mr. Castro.”²⁷ John F. Kennedy pledged that he would stand up to both men.

The notion of a “missile gap” existing between the United States and the Soviet Union in the late 1950s and early 1960s was a political assertion (and complete speculation) that the Soviets were far more capable and equipped in their strategic missile

²⁶ Falcon, 21.

²⁷ David Detzer, *The Brink: Cuban Missile Crisis, 1962* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, Publishers, 1979), 11-12.

capability and, thus, threatened our national security acutely with this advantage. As a CIA summary describes the idea: “The Missile Gap was in essence a growing perception in the West, especially in the USA, that the Soviet Union was quickly developing an intercontinental range ballistic missile (ICBM) capability earlier, in greater numbers, and with far more capability than that of the United States.”²⁸ John F. Kennedy, capitalizing on the perceived missile gap and growing communist threat, among other things, won the presidential election in a very tight race over contender Richard Nixon on 8 November 1960. John F. Kennedy was sworn in and assumed the office of President of the United States on 20 January 1961. At 43 years old, he was the youngest person to have ever been elected as the U.S. president. The Cold War tension between the United States and the Soviet Union was at its height at the time of the election. Uneasiness in the United States about communism appearing just 90 miles away in Cuba had an influence on Kennedy’s decision to move forward with the Bay of Pigs invasion.²⁹

Looking to finish his presidency in a peaceful way, yet still address the “Cuban problem” that had developed during his last year in office, President Eisenhower began exploring options. Castro’s actions and increased involvement with the Soviet Union frustrated President Eisenhower to such a degree that he was even entertaining unilateral action to blockade Cuba without the support of the Organization of American States.³⁰ Expecting trouble with Cuba, the CIA had begun planning for Castro’s removal in early

²⁸ Central Intelligence Agency, “What was the Missile Gap?” accessed 6 October 2015, <http://www.foia.cia.gov/collection/what-was-missile-gap>.

²⁹ Falcon, 29-30.

³⁰ Ibid., 21.

1960 and could provide Eisenhower with other non-military options.³¹ Ultimately, the CIA plan approved by Eisenhower in March of 1960 was multifaceted with the eventual objective of overthrowing the Castro regime. The plan, “Operation Zapata,” had four separate elements: (1) the creation of a Cuban government in exile; (2) a propaganda effort; (3) a covert intelligence effort within Cuba that was an extension of the exiled government; and (4) a trained paramilitary force outside Cuba for inevitable future guerrilla action on the island to support the ouster of Castro.³² Before Eisenhower could execute Operation Zapata, his term as president ended and Kennedy took control of the nation’s highest office.³³

While waiting to be sworn in, President-elect Kennedy was briefed on the operation by the CIA and was given the option of cancelling the plan; however, the CIA did not just brief the plan, they advocated and pressured the soon-to-be president heavily for it.³⁴ Kennedy acquiesced, and the CIA continued training the paramilitary guerilla force and preparing them for the invasion of Cuba at camps in Guatemala. The guerilla force of Cuban exiles was known as Brigade 2506 and had close to 1,500 personnel. Additionally, a few B-26 medium range bombers and C-46 and C-54 transport aircraft piloted by Cuban exiles supported the force.³⁵ This plan called for simultaneous air and

³¹ Robert M. Beer, “The U.S. Navy and the Cuban Missile Crisis” (A Trident Scholar Project, U.S. Naval Academy, Annapolis, MD, 1990), 12.

³² Falcon, 22; Young, 12.

³³ Young, 12.

³⁴ Ibid., 13.

³⁵ Ibid.

amphibious landings, with the invasion force quickly doubling in size over the first four days as disaffected Cubans joined the rebel force. A nearby airfield would provide a base for the CIA-trained exile pilots to operate the surplus B-26, C-46 and C-50 aircraft provided by the United States.

Under the Eisenhower administration, the invasion plan was backed by the U.S. military, who could provide air and logistical support and would focus on landing near Trinidad, Cuba, a decent port city southeast of Havana thought to have tenuous loyalties to the Castro regime. The beaches chosen for the landing were defensible once seized by the assault force and the Escambray Mountains provided a sanctuary to which the guerilla force could retreat should they fail to establish a firm lodgment from which to conduct their operations.³⁶ Despite the planned involvement of the U.S. military, Richard Bissell, the CIA Deputy Director for Plans, had declined to circulate the plans with the JCS and did not seek their assistance or advice in the planning of the invasion.³⁷ Bissell's decision placed the JCS in a precarious position of having to provide military forces for a plan they did not plan or even have a chance to review. Not a position in which any officer providing support troops would want to be placed.

After Kennedy took office, the JCS were finally asked to review and comment on the plans prepared by Bissell. Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Arleigh Burke, after his brief review of the plan took immediate exception to the CIA's unilateral efforts to effectively prepare for and run such a large-scale operation. Burke also took strong

³⁶ Pardoe, 23.

³⁷ Beer, 12-13.

exception to the fact that the JCS were only being asked to review and comment on the plan. On top of that, the JCS were not allowed to circulate the plan amongst the Joint Staff for feedback, and the review was limited to a very small and select committee headed by Army General David M. Gray.³⁸ This committee was not permitted to take any notes during the review and was briefed only on the Trinidad invasion site. Without much detailed analysis, the committee of officers gave a weak stamp of approval to the plan and estimated its chances of success to be “fair.”³⁹

Weeks later, at an 11 March meeting of the National Security Council, Bissell presented the plan to Kennedy and opposition to the large scale of the operation quickly developed.⁴⁰ Kennedy was concerned that the plan would require the use of American forces to ensure success; which would then expose the now covert American involvement in the plan to the international community. He ordered the plan modified to be more “quiet.”⁴¹ On 14 March, Gray’s committee reviewed three alternate sites for the landing and determined that the best site presented was the Bay of Pigs, near the Zapata Peninsula, as it had few access roads, a small population, and an airfield nearby that could support the surplus B-26 bombers provided by the CIA for air support.

Bissell presented the changes to Kennedy, but failed to describe the limited options to retreat if the brigade failed to achieve its initial objectives, as the new site was

³⁸ Beer, 13-14.

³⁹ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 16.

⁴¹ Ibid.

now 80 miles west of the Escambray Mountains and lacked adequate access through the swamps that surrounded the landing site. Kennedy, unaware of the mounting concerns from other members of the CIA and the JCS, reluctantly approved the revised plan.⁴² Weeks later, on 12 April, responding to a reporter's question about Cuba, President Kennedy indicated that, "There will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the U.S. armed forces. This government will do everything it possibly can . . . to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba."⁴³ Kennedy seemed more preoccupied with keeping the United States from being directly implicated in an intervention in Cuba or found to be supporting an operation to that effect than with the actual success of the planned invasion.

Three days later, on 15 April, the B-26 bombers of the "Cuban Expeditionary Force" kicked off Operation Zapata, striking Cuban Air Force targets at Cuban airbases in support of the landing force coming two days later.⁴⁴ The strikes were intended to make the operation appear "Cuban," yet Castro, already suspicious of an imminent invasion, was now alerted to an impending operation against his regime prompting him to deploy his forces to probable beach landing sites and to disperse and camouflage his air force assets.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the initial attack on Cuba caused quite a commotion at the United Nations as well as international condemnation of the attacks leading Kennedy to

⁴² Beer, 17; Pardoe, 25.

⁴³ Young, 14.

⁴⁴ Pardoe, 25.

⁴⁵ Pardoe, 25; Beer, 18.

cancel a second strike on 15 April and the subsequent strike planned in support of the landings on 17 April.⁴⁶ This unfavorable start to Operation Zapata would become synonymous with failed policy; however, there are a number of factors which contributed to its operational failure which must be explored in detail, such as the impact of the lack of air cover that now existed for the invasion force.

The U.S. Navy destroyer USS *Eaton* led the landing force into the Bay of Pigs early on 17 April and, with the Cuban Air Force still intact, Castro's T-33 jets attacked the force with air-to-ground rockets, destroying two of the landing ships of the initial assault wave.⁴⁷ The operation also called for follow-on air strikes against the Cuban Air Force once the invasion force was ashore, but Kennedy put the decision for further airstrikes on hold.⁴⁸ Peasants surrounding the Bay of Pigs, fearful that the invaders were part of Batista's former brutal regime, took up arms against the arriving assault force. Castro, now alerted to the exact location of the invasion, pushed ground troops toward the beachhead to counterattack. Brigade 2506, bottlenecked around the Bay of Pigs shores, battling a 900-man local Cuban militia with three mortar batteries in support, urgently pleaded for air support from their CIA advisors, yet none would be forthcoming.⁴⁹

The next day, still without air cover, the unopposed Cuban Air Force destroyed and sank two supply ships heading for the bay carrying the preponderance of the invasion

⁴⁶ Beer, 18.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁸ Pardoe, 25.

⁴⁹ Pardoe, 25-26; Beer, 19.

force's reserve ammunition, food, medical supplies, and gasoline. Around the same time, Cuban tanks began moving down the roads leading to the beachhead. Not only was the success of the invasion now in question, the troops' survival and ability to retreat to the sea or into the mountains appeared desperate. Although U.S. air and sea forces were prepared and ready to respond, President Kennedy, concerned about the reaction from the international community, would reluctantly only authorize American A-4s to escort a B-26 strike by the Cuban exiles on the morning of 19 April.⁵⁰ It was too little, too late. Later that day, as the invasion's failure became indisputable, the U.S. Navy was ordered to evacuate the force.⁵¹ Of the 1,443 exiles who landed on 17 April, the Navy managed to evacuate just 14 on the evening of 19 April.⁵² All told, 1,189 exiles were taken prisoner by Castro, approximately 140 escaped to safety through the swamps, and 114 died during the assault.⁵³

The fallout from the disaster at the Bay of Pigs was far-reaching and had significant implications on the future role the JCS had in advising President Kennedy. Finger pointing between all parties—the CIA, the JCS, the White House, and other agencies—began immediately. The planning and execution shortfalls were many and nearly every party involved was culpable. Bissell's insistence on secrecy of the highest level that limited advice to only a few members of the JCS certainly contributed. The

⁵⁰ Pardoe, 25-26; Beer, 20.

⁵¹ Pardoe, 26.

⁵² Young, 14; Pardoe, 26.

⁵³ Young, 14-15.

CIA's underestimation of Castro's response and depth of support on the island was enormous. The change of the landing site insisted on by Kennedy to make the operation more "quiet" actually exacerbated the viability of the operation and made retreat into the mountains impossible for the exiles. Even without the cancellation of the follow-on air support, which Kennedy ordered in an attempt to safeguard deniability, the invasion force likely would have lasted only a few additional days.⁵⁴ The overarching priority throughout planning was the focus on keeping American involvement in the operation a secret. With Bissell trying to keep the operation tight, the JCS were never really given the chance to take a serious look at the operation, thus their ultimate tacit approval was based on very limited information.

Even the U.S. Marine Corps, arguably the world's most experienced force regarding the conduct and execution of amphibious operations in 1961, was not privy to any of the operational planning and was only asked specifically about the suitability of the three alternate landing sites proposed following the rejection of Trinidad.⁵⁵ In this case, the administration appears to have implied full approval for the operation from the Marine Corps based on this cursory review and narrow approval of the proposed landing sites. For right or wrong (an analysis of which is beyond the scope of this paper), the President felt the JCS and the CIA had provided faulty advice and poor recommendations about the ill-fated invasion's probability of success.⁵⁶ Kennedy later commented, "The

⁵⁴ Beer, 20.

⁵⁵ Young, 15.

⁵⁶ Pardoe, 27; Beer, 21.

first advice I'm going to give my successor is to watch the generals and to avoid feeling that just because they were military men their opinions on military matters were worth a damn."⁵⁷

After the fallout from the Bay of Pigs took its toll on the White House, President Kennedy looked to make some personnel changes regarding how and from whom he received military advice. Former Army Chief of Staff Maxwell Taylor was the man President Kennedy called upon. Taylor graduated fourth in his West Point class in 1922. During various assignments through his early Army career, Taylor had become proficient in Spanish, French, and Japanese and taught at the West Point for several years. At the outset of World War II, Taylor was on the secretariat for General George Marshall and soon thereafter assigned combat duty, rising to command the 101st Airborne Division in Europe during 1944 and 1945. At the close of the Korean War, Taylor commanded the Eighth Army in 1953.⁵⁸

Kennedy was drawn to Taylor's reputation as an experienced combat leader, as well as his academic credentials. On 21 April, just days after the failed Bay of Pigs invasion, President Kennedy contacted Taylor to invite him to Washington to assist the president in addressing his problematic relationship with the JCS and to investigate the recent calamity in Cuba.⁵⁹ From 22 April to 13 June 1961, General Taylor chaired a

⁵⁷ Beer, 21; Young, 13.

⁵⁸ H. R. McMaster, *Dereliction of Duty: Lyndon Johnson, Robert McNamara, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the Lies That Led to Vietnam* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 8-9.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

committee, later called the Cuba Study Group, to review the Bay of Pigs operation, investigate its shortcomings, and provide any lessons learned to the president.⁶⁰ General Taylor was expected to balance the expected parochial interests of the other committee members appointed by the president, including Attorney General Robert Kennedy, representing the White House; Admiral Arleigh Burke, representing the JCS and the Department of Defense; and Allen Dulles, representing the CIA.⁶¹

After completing the investigation and submitting the committee's findings in June 1961, Taylor officially joined the White House staff as the military representative of the president, a new advisory position created by President Kennedy. Taylor's responsibility was "to advise and assist the President in matters concerning the military," as well as serve in advisory capacities relating to Cold War planning and intelligence efforts, especially in regard to Berlin and Southwest Asia.⁶² Because the statutory responsibilities for advising the president on these matters fell to the Chairman, JCS, the Director of the CIA, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Advisor, Kennedy emphasized to all parties that Taylor had no actual authority and would not intervene between the president and any of these advisors or agencies.⁶³ Although Taylor had no statutory authority, his advice quickly garnered him more and more trust,

⁶⁰ Jack B. Pfeiffer, "The Taylor Committee Investigation of the Bay of Pigs," Central Intelligence Agency, Washington, DC, 9 November 1984, accessed 27 December 2015, <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB355/bop-vol4.pdf>.

⁶¹ Pfeiffer, 7.

⁶² Falcon, 62.

⁶³ Ibid.

confidence, and access to the president. Kennedy was increasingly going to Taylor for military advice and began limiting his interactions with the JCS to what was required by law and necessity.⁶⁴

Kennedy continued to view the JCS as a vulnerability to his administration and looked for opportunities to place his men in those positions. In 1962, when the North Atlantic Treaty Organization commander position opened up due to the announced retirement of General Lauris Norstad, Kennedy nominated JCS Chairman General Lyman Louis Lemnitzer to be Norstad's replacement. With a vacancy in the Chairman, JCS now existing for Kennedy to fill, he took the unusual step of appointing General Taylor to the military's highest post. Having actually retired from the military as the Chief of Staff of the Army in 1959, Taylor's appointment broke the tradition of rotating the chairmanship between active flag officers from the Army, Navy, and Air Force. At the same time, Kennedy replaced Army Chief of Staff General Henry Decker with General Earle G. Wheeler, based primarily upon the recommendation of Taylor. On 1 October 1962, General Taylor assumed the position of Chairman of the JCS. With Taylor officially moving to the Pentagon, President Kennedy eliminated the position of military representative of the president, as Taylor now held the position designated by law to provide military advice to the president.⁶⁵

Taylor quickly developed a close working relationship with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Their loyalty to the president combined with common views

⁶⁴ Ibid., 63.

⁶⁵ McMaster, 22.

regarding administration and reform within the Pentagon, as well as on national strategy, made them a formidable team atop the national defense establishment where dissenting opinions from within had difficulty making it to the president.⁶⁶ Most of the other members of the JCS at the time Taylor took over as the chairman were relatively new to their positions. They included Army Chief of Staff Earle G. Wheeler, who took office on 1 October 1962; Chief of Naval Operations Admiral George W. Anderson, in office since 1 August 1961; Chief of Staff of the Air Force General Curtis E. LeMay, a member since 30 June 1961; and Commandant of the Marine Corps General David M. Shoup, a member since 1 January 1960; and the only remaining member of the JCS who was in office during the Bay of Pigs.⁶⁷

While the shakeup of the JCS was occurring, Cuba remained a problem for the administration and, noting that the CIA was continuing work on Operation Mongoose,⁶⁸ the JCS continued planning on what actions could be taken by the military itself. On 19 September 1962, the Joint Strategic Survey Council sent a memorandum to the JCS that recommended that Cuba be blockaded. By mid-September, CIA reconnaissance photos and other intelligence sources indicated that surface-to-air missile (SAM) sites, as well as

⁶⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁷ Walter S. Poole, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: How Well Did the Joint Chiefs of Staff Work?" Naval Heritage and History Command, 13 May 2014, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/publications/colloquium-on-contemporary-history/a-new-look-at-the-uban-missile-crisis/cuban-missile-crisis-joint-chiefs-of-staff.html>.

⁶⁸ Operation Mongoose was the covert CIA plan to conduct guerilla warfare on the island of Cuba and overthrow the Castro regime. Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy: Volume VIII 1961-1964* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), 159-160.

coastal defense cruise missile sites had been identified on the island of Cuba. Although analysts assessed these weapons to be defensive in nature, the Joint Strategic Survey Council recommended that should any offensive weapons be identified, the military should conduct an immediate invasion to prevent any such weapons from becoming operational. The recommendation by the National Security Council was acknowledged by the JCS at the time, but the JCS concluded that the best action would be to replace the pro-communist Castro regime in the immediate future rather than invade. The Joint Strategic Survey Council quickly responded that only an invasion could insure the removal of any offensive weapons, if detected.⁶⁹

By 1 October 1962, the U.S. Atlantic Command, led by Admiral Robert L. Dennison, the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic (CINCLANT) had developed three contingency plans for operations against Cuba, known as Operation Plans (OPLANs) 312, 314, and 316.⁷⁰ While chapter 4 provides a more detailed analysis of the development and specifics of those contingency plans, a brief overview of these plans on the shelf follows.

OPLAN 312 was a scalable contingency plan that ranged from attacking just a limited number of small targets, say SAM sites, all the way up to a full-scale air campaign to establish air superiority over Cuba and support a follow-on surface assault, if

⁶⁹ Poole, “The Cuban Missile Crisis.”

⁷⁰ Jeffrey G. Barlow, “Some Aspects of the U.S. Navy’s Participation in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” Naval Historical Center, 13 May 2014, accessed 31 August 2015, <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/publications/colloquium-on-contemporary-history/a-new-look-at-the-cuban-missile-crisis/aspects-of-the-u-s-navys-participation.html>.

needed.⁷¹ OPLANs 314 and 316 were two separate invasion plans that were distinguishable mainly in the reaction time required to execute each. OPLAN 314 called for the commencement of the invasion 18 days after receipt of the order to execute. Invasion forces would be mobilized, massed, and positioned deliberately to then carry out a simultaneous amphibious and airborne assault of the island.⁷² Admiral Dennison developed OPLAN 316 as an alternative to OPLAN 314 for execution on a much shorter notice, five days, instead of the 18 required for OPLAN 314. The invasion would initially be just the airborne units, with amphibious forces assaulting several days later as they became available in the theater.⁷³

As talk of invading Cuba became more common with senior administration officials and the JCS over the year, Commandant of the Marine Corps General David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps, expressed great caution and shared that an invasion of Cuba would be a significant endeavor. To help reinforce and illustrate his point, Shoup placed a map of the United States on an overhead projector and then placed an overlay of Cuba over the map. The island of Cuba was 1,800 miles long and stretched from Florida to Chicago. He then placed a transparency with a red dot over the top of the

⁷¹ Atlantic Command, Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis* (Norfolk, VA: Atlantic Command, 1963), 17-19.

⁷² Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 20; Jonathan M. House, "Joint Operational Problems in the Cuban Missile Crisis," *Parameters: United States Army War College Quarterly* 21 (Spring 1991): 95.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

Cuban overlay.⁷⁴ “What’s that dot?” one of the officials asked. “That, gentlemen,” Shoup shared, “represents the size of the island of Tarawa.”⁷⁵

It was on the tiny island of Tarawa in 1943 that Shoup had won the Medal of Honor fighting with and leading the Marines in a vicious amphibious assault against the deeply entrenched Japanese, and now, he was reminding the JCS that it took 18,000 Marines over three days to secure the island in that bloody, costly battle. He deferred to the imagination of the JCS to figure what larger number of Soldiers and Marines might be needed to conquer the much larger island of Cuba.⁷⁶ While Shoup was sharing his reservations on possibly invading Cuba, Admiral Dennison and his staff continued to work on the development and refinement of the OPLANs through the summer and fall of 1962.

While the process of producing operational contingency plans in a headquarters may be considered an academic exercise in completing a staff planning process, actually getting those assigned forces into place and then executing those contingency plans would be far more challenging. In the next chapter, the events that brought about an increase in the readiness posture of the forces involved OPLANs 312, 314, and 316; the large mobilization that occurred; the problems encountered with those forces; and some of the lessons that can be gleaned shall be reviewed.

⁷⁴ Howard Jablon, *David M. Shoup: A Warrior Against War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 87.

⁷⁵ Detzer, 15.

⁷⁶ Jablon, 87.

CHAPTER 3

GETTING OUT THE DOOR: INCREASED READINESS, EMBARKATION AND INITIAL DEPLOYMENT

The Case for Concrete Intelligence

In August 1962, Director of Central Intelligence, John A. McCone, believed that the Soviets were deploying nuclear weapons to Cuba and voiced his concern to the intelligence community and to the White House numerous times, nearly two months before American U-2 reconnaissance flights actually obtained hard photographic evidence. Why and how, was McCone, the senior intelligence official in the United States, so certain of this? Simply put, the evidence collected by the CIA led him to this conclusion.⁷⁷ In the summer of 1962, the CIA was following and reporting on the arms buildup by the Soviet Union in Cuba and that the Soviets were deploying one of its most advanced SAM systems, the SA-2, to Cuba.⁷⁸

What McCone found strange was that the missiles were being placed in atypical locations, such as on the perimeter of the island. Normally, SAMs were expected to be placed near airfields and other key infrastructure, not on the perimeter of the whole island. Additionally, the CIA noticed that the Soviets took enormous precautions to hide their activities on the island. Reports from agents on the island, as well as from refugees fleeing Cuba, indicated a significant amount of suspicious activity by the Cuban military

⁷⁷ Blight and Welch, 3.

⁷⁸ Gregory W. Pedlow and Donald E. Welzenbach, *The CIA and the U-2 Program, 1954-1974* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1998), 200-201.

and the possible arrival of missiles.⁷⁹ In stark contrast to McCone, the United States intelligence community, however, did not appear concerned.

On 19 September 1962, a Special National Intelligence Estimate regarding the military buildup on Cuba concluded that the Soviets would not deploy Medium Range Ballistic Missiles and Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles to the island, deeming such action “incompatible with Soviet practice to date.”⁸⁰ Looking at the same facts that the Special National Intelligence Estimate did, McCone deduced that the Soviets were concealing something of tremendous significance. Disagreeing with his analysts, McCone thought these were indicators that the Soviet Union was placing strategic nuclear missiles in Cuba.⁸¹ However, McCone needed more than a hunch to drive a policy change or garner presidential action to address the perceived threat, especially when the hunch was in contrast to the reports presented by professional analysts. McCone needed concrete evidence to support his theory.

Due to the discovery of the SA-2s on Cuba, administration officials became more concerned with the possibility of a U-2 reconnaissance aircraft being shot down over Cuba. As established by the downing of a U-2 piloted by Francis Gary Powers by an SA-2 over the Soviet Union in May 1960, the SA-2 was not a threat to take lightly. Planning of reconnaissance flights over Cuba became more deliberate, and they were only executed when the weather forecast over the targeted flight path was less than 25 percent

⁷⁹ Garthoff, “U.S. Intelligence in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” 22.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Blight and Welch, 5.

overcast. Mainly due to weather, the CIA completed just two U-2 flights over Cuba in August and barely three in September 1962.⁸² Even with this handful of flights, the scope of the conventional military buildup on the island was becoming clearer and was even included in the CIA's daily intelligence briefing to the President on 28 September 1962 (see figure 1).

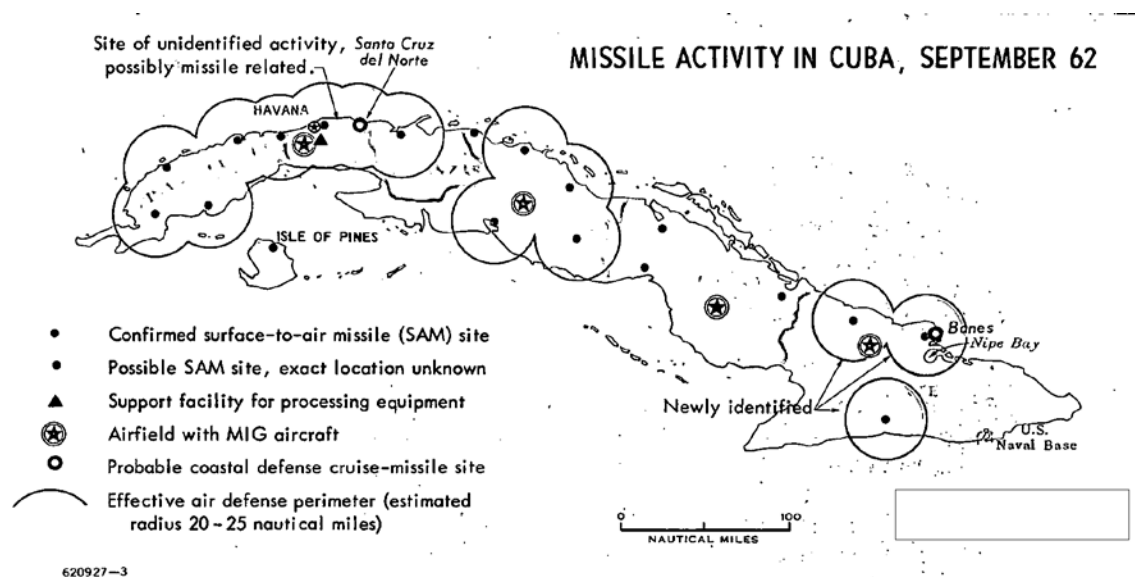


Figure 1. Missile Activity in Cuba, September 1962

Source: Central Intelligence Agency, "The President's Intelligence Checklist," accessed 27 September 2015, http://www.foia.cia.gov/sites/default/files/document_conversions/1827265/DOC_0005995953.pdf, 2.

Shortly thereafter, on 1 October 1962, in response to the significant buildup of SAMs and other Soviet military equipment on the island, the newly formed JCS met with

⁸² Pedlow and Welsenbach, 201-205.

Secretary McNamara and began a review of the contingency plans relating to Cuba.⁸³ On that same day, for reasons likely relating to the JCS meeting with McNamara, Admiral Robert L. Dennison sent a message to all subordinate commanders earmarked for participation in CINCLANT OPLAN 312 to take all feasible measures necessary to assure maximum readiness to begin execution of OPLAN 312 by 20 October 1962. Admiral Dennison's message also included authorization to preposition necessary aviation ordnance and support material required for the execution of OPLAN 312.⁸⁴ FMFLANT, as a subordinate command under the Atlantic Fleet, accelerated planning and preparations to increase its readiness posture for the execution of OPLAN 312.⁸⁵ It is worth noting that Admiral Dennison dual-hatted as the Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic Fleet (CINCLANTFLT)—the U.S. Navy component of the Atlantic Command, as well as was the CINCLANT.

Although OPLAN 312 was a scalable contingency plan providing for a rapid response of U.S. airpower against Cuba, it also included a provision for the rapid reinforcement and defense of the U.S. Naval Base, Guantanamo.⁸⁶ The U.S. Marine Corps' 5th MEB based at Camp Pendleton, California, was designated to provide that

⁸³ Poole, "The Cuban Missile Crisis."

⁸⁴ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 39.

⁸⁵ Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, *Command Diary of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic and II Marine Expeditionary Force*, 28 January 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, 1-3-1. Hereafter referred to as *Command Diary of HQ FMFLANT and II MEF*.

⁸⁶ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 86.

rapid reinforcement force.⁸⁷ However, on 1 October 1962, the 5th MEB was still in a cadre status and not a formed and viable unit yet. In order to meet Admiral Dennison's intent to have all units participating in OPLAN 312 to be prepared to execute by 20 October, the Commanding General (CG), FMFPAC would need to initiate a number of staff actions in order to prepare for the likely mobilization and employment of the 5th MEB.

5th MEB Planning Concerns

The 5th MEB has a history that dates back to the World War I. Originally activated in 1918 in Quantico, Virginia, the 5th MEB saw action in France guarding supply lines and garrisons that were critical to supporting the 5th and 6th Marine Regiments during the allied defeat of the German Army in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive.⁸⁸ Since then, the 5th MEB has been deactivated and reactivated on several occasions to provide Marine Air Ground Task Force capabilities to the operational needs of the country's combatant commanders. One such occasion was during the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962.

In early 1962, the 5th MEB was organized as a cadre unit that would only be activated upon the execution of the Cuban Contingency Plans. This small group of officers and enlisted members would meet periodically over the course of the year to the

⁸⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁸⁸ GySgt Alexis R. Mulero, "Marines Activate Historic 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, 'The Right Force, Right Now'," 15 November 2015, U.S. Marine Corps, accessed 15 January 2016, <http://www.5thmeb.marines.mil/News/NewsArticleDisplay/tabid/24077/Article/628968/marines-activate-historic-5th-marine-expeditionary-brigade-the-right-force-right.aspx>.

extent needed to familiarize themselves with and complete their portion of the plans in support of the Cuban contingency. On 12 April 1962, the tables of organization for the Brigade Headquarters and Headquarters Company were approved and the 5th MEB would remain in a cadre status until activated by official message. To support the activation of the 5th MEB when required, three major West Coast commands were assigned the responsibility for filling the tables of organization line numbers: the 1st Marine Division (MARDIV), the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, and Force Troops, FMFPAC. Each of these commands maintained current rosters of the personnel to be assigned to the 5th MEB upon its activation.⁸⁹

On 2 October, the day following Secretary McNamara's inquiry into the status of the Cuban Contingency Plans with the JCS, the availability of Eastern Pacific U.S. Marine ground combat forces for rapid deployment to support FMFLANT contingency planning became a subject of conversation between the Commander-in-Chief, Pacific Fleet (CINCPACFLT) and the CG, FMFPAC. Later that day, to address questions that arose from the discussion between CINCPACFLT and the CG, FMFPAC, the staff for 1st MARDIV (Reinforced), a supporting unit of FMFPAC and the primary ground combat force of the command, conducted an analysis of available ground combat forces in the Eastern Pacific area at the time. The staff, focused on the period of October 1962 to January 1963, determined that four infantry battalions were available for immediate

⁸⁹ Commanding General, 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, *Command Diary of the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, 18 October 1962 to 5 November 1962, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific*, 21 November 1962, Marine Corps History Division–Archives Branch, Marine Corps Base-Quantico, VA, 1. Hereafter referred to as *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*.

deployment. 1st MARDIV relayed that fact to the CG, FMFPAC the same day.⁹⁰ Not surprisingly, 5th MEB's participation in OPLANs 312, 314 and 316 all called for a four battalion complement as its ground combat element.⁹¹

On 4 October, two days later, it became apparent to the CG, 1st MARDIV, that the status and planning responsibilities that fell on the 5th MEB were troublesome. Again, organized as a cadre unit that had its manning rosters filled only when officially activated for contingencies, the 5th MEB headquarters had just one commissioned officer and nine enlisted men permanently assigned to the command at that time. The 5th MEB mission, as part of OPLANs 312, 314 and 316, required over 50 percent of the division personnel and equipment be assigned in support, as well as the requirement to provide an embarkation reaction time of 96 hours or less.⁹²

The personnel that filled out most of the 5th MEB staff were generally the same officers that were slated to fill billets for the upcoming division/wing landing exercise "Steel Gate" for which the division was preparing. On 5 October, in consideration of the planning requirements, personnel available, and the responsiveness and scope of the 5th MEB plans, the CG, 1st MARDIV, recommended to the CG, FMFPAC, that 1st MARDIV assume planning responsibilities for 5th MEB.⁹³

⁹⁰ Commanding General, 1st Marine Division (Rein), FMF, *Report of Mount-Out of BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 1962 Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, 1. Hereafter referred to as *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*.

⁹¹ *Command Diary of HQ FMFLANT and II MEF*, 1-3-A-5.

⁹² *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 2.

Back at Norfolk, Virginia, planning and coordination continued at CINCLANT and FMFLANT to improve the readiness posture of the commands in support of Cuban contingency operations. On 6 October, CINCLANT requested recommendations for the development of the highest state of readiness possible for the execution of OPLANs 312, 314, and 316 to include the relocation and prepositioning of troops, aircraft, ships, equipment, and supplies. CINCLANT asked for those recommendations no later than 15 October.⁹⁴

Meanwhile, out on the West Coast that same day, 6 October, the CG, FMFPAC, requested a copy of the draft II MEF OPLAN 316-62 and directed that the CG, Aircraft, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific (AIRFMFPAC), who was exercising command over 1st MARDIV at the time, comment and make recommendations regarding the 5th MEB planning responsibilities. In a quick response that same day, CG AIRFMFPAC indicated that comments would be withheld pending receipt of the draft plan and additional details therein contained. For reasons not readily apparent, the status regarding the planning activities of the yet-to-be activated 5th MEB remained unchanged for nearly two more weeks.⁹⁵ No significant adjustment to training within 1st MARDIV was made and routine business continued. This was the general posture of the 5th MEB and the 1st Marine Division through to 18 October 1962 when events began to change rapidly.

In the meantime out on the East Coast, FMFLANT, the Marine headquarters within the U.S. Atlantic Fleet, was also overseeing and carrying out significant

⁹⁴ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 40; *Command Diary of HQ FMFLANT and II MEF*, Tab HHH, Appendix 7.

⁹⁵ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 2.

preparations to increase its force readiness posture for the execution of OPLAN 312, as directed by Admiral Dennison.⁹⁶ From 1 to 18 October, these actions included the following: prepositioning a Marine Air Group to Key West, Florida; redeploying Marine Air Group-26 from Mississippi back to New River, North Carolina, on 11 October, as this force had been supporting the XVIII Airborne Corps in the suppression of civil disorder relating to minority enrollments in a local university; as well as participating in numerous planning conferences for the continued refinement of OPLANs 312, 314, and 316.⁹⁷

Elements of the 2nd MARDIV, the primary ground combat element of FMFLANT, were preparing to embark and participate in Amphibious Brigade Landing Exercise-62 (PHIBRIGLEX-62) that was scheduled for the period of 15 October to 3 November 1962. The focus of the exercise was on the training, employment, and integration of naval forces with embarked Marine forces in the conduct of amphibious assault operations and associated support. The objective of the exercise was to be Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. The total forces involved in PHIBRIGLEX-62 were quite substantial. These forces included: a striking and covering naval surface force, an amphibious task force that included two amphibious squadrons and a landing force organized as the 4th MEB containing a Regimental Landing Team (RLT) headquarters and three battalion landing teams (BLTs), an anti-submarine warfare group, and a

⁹⁶ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 153.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 154-155.

logistics support force. In all, approximately 20,000 naval personnel and 4,000 Marines were scheduled to take part in the exercise.⁹⁸

The 4th MEB headquarters, the participating Marine helicopter squadrons, and BLTs 3/2 and 1/6 commenced loading on 15 October.⁹⁹ Embarkation was completed on 17 October and the force sailed for the objective area that same day. BLT 2/2, the third BLT scheduled to participate in PHIBRIGLEX-62 was already embarked and in the Caribbean with Amphibious Squadron Eight (PHIBRON EIGHT) serving as the Ready PHIBRON and BLT for the Caribbean Command.¹⁰⁰ Of note, the notional communist tyrant and enemy force that the Marines would be conducting the exercise against on the Vieques Island was referred to as the Ortsac Regime, with some even referring to the amphibious assault as Operation Ortsac.¹⁰¹ Ortsac, incidentally and not so subtly, is Castro spelled backwards.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 2.

⁹⁹ Marine Corps infantry battalions are identified by a single digit, a slash, and another single digit (i.e., 3/2). The first digit is the numbered battalion and the second digit is the numbered regiment. Each Marine Corps infantry regiment has three infantry battalions assigned and they are numbered 1st, 2nd, and 3rd battalion. In the above example, 3/2 corresponds to 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment. Additionally, the regiment's number also identifies the coast under which the regiment resides and is simple to recognize. Odd numbered regiments are aligned with the Pacific Command and even numbered regiments are aligned with Atlantic Command. In the above example, the 2nd Marine Regiment (along with the 6th and 8th Marine Regiments) falls under the Atlantic Command as part of the 2nd MARDIV. The 1st, 3rd, 5th and 7th Marine Regiments all fall under the Pacific Command as part of the 1st and 3rd MARDIVs.

¹⁰⁰ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 2.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. See also Lillian Goldman Law Library, "The Cuban Missile Crisis," Yale Law School, accessed 25 September 2015, http://avalon.law.yale.edu/subject_menus/msc_cubamenu.asp.

Launch the Ready BLT

On 18 October at 2345Z, the JCS directed one battalion be “chopped”¹⁰² from the 5th MEB at Camp Pendleton to CINCLANT and fly to Guantanamo as soon as possible to reinforce the Naval Base. Military Air Transit Service (MATS) was assigned the responsibility of lifting the battalion designated for transfer to CINCLANT. In the late hours of 18 October, the CG, 1st MARDIV, was notified of the JCS order and that it was one of the 5th MEB units. The CG alerted the 1st MARDIV staff.¹⁰³

At 0800 local the next morning, the Battalion Commander, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment (2/1)—the 1st MARDIV “Ready” BLT—was briefed at the Division Command Post. Although BLT 2/1 was slated as a 5th MEB unit for contingency operations, the decision was made at that time that the division would control and direct the mount-out of BLT 2/1, as the 5th MEB, still yet to be activated, had no functioning staff.¹⁰⁴ Later that day (2150Z), the division sent a message to the Commander, Military Air Transit Service (COMMATS), which provided the initial data and lift requirements for BLT 2/1.¹⁰⁵

BLT 2/1 continued its preparations for lift at Marine Corps Air Station (MCAS) El Toro, California; although they reported they did not have a fourth echelon, essentially

¹⁰² “Chop” refers to the detachment of operation command of a unit or force from one command to another command. In this case, 5th MEB is under the Operational Control of CINCPAC and is being “chopped” to the Operational Control of CINCLANT.

¹⁰³ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 92.

¹⁰⁴ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 2.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.

heavy repair and overhaul, maintenance capability.¹⁰⁶ At 0121Z on 20 October, 1st MARDIV requested the date and time of arrival for the first aircraft. At 0200Z, BLT 2/1 was in place, ready for transport upon arrival of aircraft at MCAS El Toro. Shortly thereafter (0255Z), 1st MARDIV sent the remainder of the detailed data for total lift requirements to COMMATS.¹⁰⁷

While BLT 2/1 waited, the Chief of Staff, FMFLANT notified 1st MARDIV that the initial airlift data in the top-secret message to COMMATS could not be decrypted properly. The CG, 1st MARDIV, ordered a liaison officer from the G-3 to fly to COMMATS at Scott Air Force Base, Illinois, and provide the required information for the troop and equipment lift of BLT 2/1. That 1st MARDIV liaison officer departed El Toro via jet at 1930Z on 20 October with an estimated time of arrival of 2335Z at Scott Air Force Base.¹⁰⁸ Forty-eight hours had elapsed since the alert order to fly the West Coast Ready BLT to Guantanamo, and yet, the required official coordination (relay of complete airlift data) between the 1st MARDIV and COMMATS had still not taken place.

Meanwhile, unofficial communication (i.e., unsecured) was made between 1st MARDIV and MATS that same day at least got things moving. The Chief of Staff, 1st

¹⁰⁶ Fourth echelon maintenance provides for repair and overhaul of major modular parts and other diagnosis and repair not authorized at lower echelons and which do not require depot level, fifth echelon repair. Headquarters, U.S. Marine Corps, MCO P4790.1, *Marine Corps Integrated Maintenance Management System (MIMMS) Introduction Manual* (Washington, DC: Department of the Navy, 1992), 2-5.

¹⁰⁷ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

MARDIV, coordinated with U.S. Air Force Lieutenant Colonel McCloud of Transport Forces Division, Plans & Capabilities, Department of Air Force, the personnel weight and cube and dimensions of the heaviest item for BLT 2/1. At 1900Z that afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel McCloud indicated that the first C-135 with a control team on board should arrive El Toro within the “next couple of hours.”¹⁰⁹ While the 1st MARDIV embarkation officer and Lieutenant Colonel McCloud continued to work through lift issues, the lack of a fourth echelon maintenance capability for BLT 2/1 had hit the desk of the CG, FMFLANT.

Later that evening on 20 October, the CG, FMFLANT sent a message back to the CG, FMFPAC requesting that a fourth echelon maintenance capability be provided for BLT 2/1. Clearly, the CG, FMFLANT wanted BLT 2/1 to report with all needed support and minimize the impact on his command. Guantanamo Bay is a long way from the heavy maintenance facilities of Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The misfortune of delayed airlift data and the subsequent problems getting COMMATS aircraft to MCAS El Toro actually appears to have bought enough time for CG, FMFPAC to find a maintenance capability for BLT 2/1. By mid-day on 21 October, a maintenance detachment from 1st Force Service Regiment had been assigned to BLT 2/1 and immediately began its mount-out and headed for MCAS El Toro for embark.¹¹⁰

A few hours after the CG, FMFLANT had requested a fourth echelon maintenance capability be provided for BLT 2/1, the 1st MARDIV liaison officer sent via

¹⁰⁹ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

jet to COMMATS on Scott Air Force Base arrived and completed the submission of the Top Secret messages required for the airlift of BLT 2/1. Additionally, while briefing the MATS Chief of Staff on details regarding the embarkation data, the 1st MARDIV liaison was informed that the original message to commence lift from CINCLANT was unintelligible and could not be decrypted properly and that subsequent 1st MARDIV Top Secret messages were not received at COMMATS. Having completed the necessary coordination for MATS lift, the Marine liaison was provided details on the types, numbers, schedules and estimated times of arrival of aircraft at MCAS El Toro. Additionally, he was provided a hard copy of MATS Operational Directive 171862 (airlift order for BLT 2/1) and hand-carried it back to Camp Pendleton on his return that evening of 21 October.¹¹¹

While the official coordination was occurring aboard Scott Air Force Base, the initial increments of the airlift of BLT 2/1 were beginning to depart MCAS El Toro for Guantanamo Bay. By the early morning hours of 22 October, the entirety of personnel for BLT 2/1 had departed El Toro and later that day, at 1507Z, the last aircraft carrying equipment had departed. Shortly after, at 1716Z, the CG, 1st MARDIV reported to the CG, FMFPAC that the mount-out of BLT 2/1 was complete.¹¹² When it was finally concluded, BLT 2/1 was lifted to Guantanamo Bay with 89 sorties of MATS aircraft, arriving with all required equipment and five days of supply for combat. Follow-on MATS sorties over the next several days would provide an additional ten days' supply of

¹¹¹ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 4.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

ammunition and rations for the battalion. In all, the MATS airlift would transport 1,797 personnel and 130,222 pounds of cargo in 89 sorties.¹¹³

The original JCS order to chop a West Coast Marine infantry battalion to CINLANT and reinforce Guantanamo was issued on 18 October at 2345Z and it took just shy of four days to get the entirety of the unit airborne and on its way to Guantanamo. Because the actual aircraft used to lift the Ready BLT may be beyond the control of the Marine Corps, the reaction time to be airborne can also be considered to be beyond the direct control of the Marine Corps. Accordingly, the standard required from the Marine Corps and the Ready BLT during this period in response to an airlift directive was to have the ready unit(s) at the port of embarkation (POE) within 24 hours of notification prepared for lift. BLT 2/1 reported to have been ready to move upon arrival of MATS aircraft at the POE since 0200Z on 20 October, just over 24 hours from the original JCS message (although only 12 hours from when the battalion commander was notified). However, BLT 2/1 did not have all its equipment for deployment (required fourth echelon maintenance) and it can be assessed from this point that it was not at the POE ready to depart within 24 hours of notification.¹¹⁴

Additionally, it appears absolutely stunning that to complete the required communication between the MATS at Scott Air Force Base and the Marine Corps operating forces requiring lift in California, that a Marine liaison officer had to physically fly out to Illinois and hand carry the requisite data to complete the necessary coordination

¹¹³ Young, 127, quoted in *Command Diary of BLT 2/1*, 1963, 1-9.

¹¹⁴ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 9.

for the airlift. The Marine Corps prides itself on being the nation's expeditionary force-in-readiness; and although it encountered delays and friction getting BLT 2/1 launched, the Corps was clearly not so ready in this case. So, how would the Marine Corps do in getting an entire infantry regiment with complementary logistics support and aviation elements mounted out and shipped on short notice? In just a few short days, that question would be answered as well.

Activation of the 5th MEB

On 18 October 1962, the permanent members of the 5th MEB headquarters staff consisted of Assistant G-2, Major James S. Wilson, and nine enlisted men from the G-2 and adjutant sections. Because the 5th MEB was in a cadre status and not yet activated (essentially existing only on paper), other cadre members were assigned various monitor duties and tasked with carrying out the necessary staff actions for the 5th MEB, in addition to their regular duty assignments. The monitor staff was composed of the following officers:

Commanding General	Brigadier General W. T. Fairbourn
G-1	Lieutenant Colonel L. E. Veigel
G-3	Lieutenant Colonel H. W. Card, Jr.
G-4	Lieutenant Colonel W. D. Wilcox
CO, LogSptGru	Lieutenant Colonel H. Wallace
EmbO	Major M. E. George
SupO	Major E. R. Toner

CEO

Major J. L. A. Lemneck

Adj/StfSecy

Captain R. W. Goodale¹¹⁵

On 19 October, with the directive that BLT 2/1, a unit identified as part the 5th MEB contingency plan, be transferred to the East Coast and reinforce Guantanamo, Brigadier General Fairbourn alerted the 5th MEB staff of possible activation and began taking preparatory action with the monitor staff.¹¹⁶ Late in the day on 19 October, General Fairbourn directed that key individuals in the 5th MEB staff meet for a conference to review the possible mission and tasks of the brigade, status of the brigade, and the possibility of activation. At the time of this conference, no directive had been issued directing the brigade or any of its elements to activate.¹¹⁷

The next day, events began moving quickly for the 5th MEB staff. At 0337Z on 20 October 1962, the administrative office for FMFPAC received a directive to activate the 5th MEB headquarters. Later that day, the Commanding General, AIRFMFPAC, sent a message to all Eastern Pacific commands that the 5th MEB headquarters had been activated and to be prepared to provide 5th MEB forces and personnel, as required.¹¹⁸ At around the same time, the U.S. Navy was beginning its preparations to support the 5th MEB's possible activation (at this point, only the 5th MEB Headquarters had been activated). The CINCPACFLT directed the Commander Amphibious Forces, Pacific

¹¹⁵ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹¹⁸ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 5.

(COMPHIBPAC) to assemble shipping for 5th MEB lift in embarkation ports, but to withhold the commencement of loading until directed.¹¹⁹

While the 5th MEB headquarters and staff was forming, the mount out of BLT 2/1 was being completed at MCAS El Toro. Although the actions taken to support the mount-out of BLT 2/1 was completed by 1st MARDIV, the 5th MEB staff were closely monitoring, as BLT 2/1 was one of the forces designated for deployment with the 5th MEB for contingency operations. Because the original directive to chop one infantry battalion from the West Coast dictated it be a 5th MEB unit and as no order to reconstitute the battalion had been received, General Fairbourn recommended to the CG, FMFLANT that planning proceed with the activation and deployment of the 5th MEB based on the assumption that ultimately four battalions would be available to the brigade to execute its portion of the Cuban contingencies plans. This assumption included that if BLT 2/1 was not available to the brigade for use in assault landings then an additional infantry battalion with full combat support and service support would be provided in theatre.¹²⁰ Essentially, General Fairbourn planned to embark the other three battalions earmarked for the Cuban contingency, but would do so with enough amphibious shipping to support the assumed addition of a fourth infantry battalion in theater.

Prior to General Fairbourn proceeding with planning under this assumption, CINCLANT had already sent several messages indicating that with the chop of BLT 2/1, the 5th MEB would now be made up of three infantry battalions for the Cuban

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 3.

Contingency Plans. Furthermore, at 2034Z on October 20 follow-on message traffic from CINCLANT made specific changes to OPLAN 312-62, Annex L para 2 (a)(4) that confirmed this stating, “In addition to the forces in sub-paragraph 2 (b)(1) above, the following forces may be available for reinforcement: (A) 1 MEB (5th MEB less one Battalion).”¹²¹ A few hours later, General Fairbourn sent a message to the CG, FMFLANT stating that certain unspecified capabilities of BLT 2/1 were needed for the execution of the brigade’s mission and that additionally, OPLANs 314-61 and 316-62 called for a total four battalions in execution. Shortly thereafter, the CG, FMFLANT sent a message to CINCLANTFLT, requesting that the 5th MEB be reconstituted to its original planned strength of four infantry battalions for operations.¹²²

While General Fairbourn was exchanging messages with FMFPAC and FMFLANT about the planned task organization of the 5th MEB, the brigade headquarters continued to form. By mid-afternoon on 21 October 1962, all assigned personnel from Force Troops, FMFPAC had reported for duty and nearly all individuals from the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing had reported for duty.¹²³ Early that same day, General Fairbourn alerted all West Coast supply agencies of the strong possibility that the 5th MEB would be activated and begin embarking for mount-out. He also requested that contingency supplies and materials (the code name for those contingency supplies and materials was known as STORM stocks) be readied for withdrawal, but iterated that reaction times

¹²¹ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 5.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 3.

required would not commence until actual orders to begin the withdrawal had been received.¹²⁴ General Fairbourn was taking all pertinent steps to get out in front of the expected activation of his brigade. By 1200 on 22 October 1962, with just a few exceptions, all personnel assigned to the 5th MEB staff and headquarters company were present for duty.¹²⁵

Early that afternoon on 22 October 1962, General Fairbourn held a conference with the 5th MEB staff and assigned unit commanders that would join the brigade once formally activated. Items discussed at the meeting included the troop list, the brigade task organization, embarkation and the administration plan for the contingency. The administration plan was comparable to a very detailed paragraph 4 (administration and logistics) of a modern day operations order. In this case, the brigade G-4 (logistics officer) reviewed the 5th MEB Administration Plan 314-61 that supported OPLAN 314-61 in great detail with the staff present and distributed copies of the administration plan to unit commanders and unit embarkation officers for further preparation and embarkation planning. Great emphasis was placed on prescribed load, spare parts, supplies that needed to be embarked, landing group supplies, and resupply planning. However, because the 5th MEB had not yet been officially activated, the actual contingency and operations plans were not discussed at this conference.¹²⁶ As General Fairbourn's conference was wrapping up, a television set was brought into the conference

¹²⁴ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 6.

¹²⁵ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

room and the President of the United States presented an important message to the nation regarding Soviet missiles being constructed on the island of Cuba.¹²⁷

During that speech, President Kennedy announced the establishment of the naval quarantine that would be effective at 0900 on 24 October. The quarantine was intended to prevent the shipment of additional offensive weapons to Cuba, but a quarantine itself could obviously not remove the Soviet missiles already on the island of Cuba. President Kennedy made clear that he intended for the Soviets to remove those missiles and, if necessary, the United States was prepared to take additional action.¹²⁸ To the watching staff of the 5th MEB there was now no doubt to where their likely deployment would be heading.

While the 5th MEB staff was watching President Kennedy's speech, the JCS was already setting in motion the large build-up of force to support the "additional action" that might become necessary to accomplish the president's objectives. That afternoon, at 1805Z, the JCS directed that 5th MEB load immediately and chop forces involved to the operational control of CINCLANT. Within a few hours, CINCPAC, COMPHIBPAC, CG, FMFPAC and the CG, 5th MEB were notified to embark the 5th MEB in designated shipping without delay. At the same time, the Chief of Naval Operations gave authorization for the release of STORM materials to support the mount-out. At 2202Z, based on a telephone conversation with the CG, FMFPAC, the CG, 5th MEB announced the activation of the brigade and CG, 1st MARDIV directed forces and major units on the

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 1.

troop list assigned to 5th MEB contingency operation to report when they were under the operational control of 5th MEB.¹²⁹ The next morning, COMPHIBPAC notified all pertinent ships of the mount-out of the 5th MEB and that embarkation would begin that at 0900 that day from the San Diego area ports (Camp Del Mar, Camp Pendleton; U.S. Naval Station, San Diego; and Naval Air Station, North Island).¹³⁰

Personnel processing for the 5th MEB began immediately without significant incident until it was identified that the preponderance of personnel assigned to the brigade were reporting under temporary additional duty orders. Personnel in a temporary additional duty status remain as assets on their parent units under the accounting procedures of the time and not show up in the personnel strength of the 5th MEB. This could have significant adverse effects on proper accountability and combat casualty reporting for the brigade. To rectify the situation, the major West Coast commands supporting the mount-out had to cancel all the temporary additional duty orders and reassign those personnel to sub-units within their respective commands. Those sub-units would then be placed under both operational and administrative control of the 5th MEB.¹³¹

Additionally, the Division Legal Section from 1st MARDIV sent Legal Contact Teams to the major subordinate commands to support and assist in the preparation of wills, powers of attorney, and releases concerning the storage of vehicles and other

¹²⁹ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 6.

¹³⁰ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

goods, as well as other non-military legal matters. For example, within the brigade headquarters alone, it had 86 wills and 51 powers of attorney prepared for their mount-out. Meanwhile, the Brigade Intelligence Section, which again contained the only permanently assigned personnel prior to the brigade's activation (Major Wilson and nine enlisted men), was brought up to full strength and began the laborious process of getting the section caught up on the current situation and assigning support to the brigades' subordinate units. This work included: updating the enemy situation; providing counter intelligence teams to the 5th MEB headquarters, the brigade's RLT, and its subordinate battalions; providing interrogator/translator teams to the RLT and battalions; and reproducing and disseminating to subordinate units background information on Cuba, intelligence estimates, overlays of fixed positions, available photography, and the unit's intelligence standard operating procedures. Incredibly, in that handful of days before the brigade set sail, the intelligence section unpacked, inventoried, re-crated and delivered to all supported units a total of 247,000 maps that would be needed to meet the requirements of the brigade.¹³² By any measure of it, the administrative efforts required to bring together the brigade and prepare it for deployment were substantial.

Beyond the problems associated with the administrative effort to form the brigade, questions and problems remained regarding its embarkation and mount-out on shipping. One of those concerns was regarding the assumption General Fairbourn had made regarding the reconstitution of the brigade's fourth BLT once it arrived in the Caribbean theater. In the early morning hours of 23 October, Headquarters Marine Corps

¹³² *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962, 6-7.*

informed the CG, 1st MARDIV that it was 99 percent certain that the 5th MEB would be reconstituted with its fourth BLT and that matter was before the JCS for decision.

However, the battalion would likely have to be locally sourced and provided by the 1st MARDIV. This meant that the CG, 1st MARDIV would have to pull a battalion from its dwell period between deployments early to meet this requirement. Two hours later, Headquarters Marine Corps informed 1st MARDIV that the JCS had approved reconstitution of the brigade with the fourth BLT and required forces.¹³³

1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment (1/7) was now ordered to report under operational control to 5th MEB and additionally, the CG, 1st MARDIV directed the reconstitution of 1st Battalion, 11th Marines, as well as the brigade's anti-tank company and light support company, all of which had previously detached elements to support the mount-out and deployment of BLT 2/1. With the addition of 1/7, the brigade's ground combat element was now fully constituted per the troop list. The brigade ground combat element now consisted of the 1st Marine Regiment (Reinforced) and its three subordinate reinforced infantry battalions: 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment; 3rd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment; 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment that formed to make RLT-1, and 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment would serve as the brigade reserve force.¹³⁴ Later that day, at 1600Z on 23 October, the 5th MEB was formally activated by official dispatch and ordered to complete embarkation within 96 hours.¹³⁵ With the brigade now formally

¹³³ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962, 7; Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB, 7.*

¹³⁴ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB, 7.*

¹³⁵ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962, 6-7.*

activated, planning and embarkation activities increased at a substantially quickened pace.

At the three widely dispersed embarkation points (Camp Del Mar, Camp Pendleton; U.S. Naval Station, San Diego; and Naval Air Station, North Island, San Diego) that were nearly 50 miles apart, 5th MEB sent personnel from the adjutant section to each ship to assist in the completion and consolidation of accurate embarkation rosters. In spite of these efforts, several ships would sail without submitting completed embarkation rosters to the 5th MEB headquarters forcing their retrieval at sea by courier. Even so, there were significant discrepancies between what was being reported on daily accountability rosters provided by each ship (which broke down all personnel on board by officer and enlisted) and what was provided to the brigade headquarters on the embarkation rosters. It was not until well after the 5th MEB had sailed and reached the Panama Canal Zone that physical liaison could be conducted between ships and the embarkation rosters finally and accurately be completed.¹³⁶

While the brigade adjutant section was struggling to get a handle on accountability, unit embarkation officers were continuing to consolidate and load supplies and equipment at each of the three POEs. By the evening of 24 October, the preponderance of all classes of supply, with the exception of Class V (ammunition) and Class Va (aviation ordnance), had arrived at the POEs. To expedite the delivery of the required Class V stocks, direct communications between the POEs, the distribution centers (Naval Ammunition Depots at Fallbrook, California, and Hawthorne, Nevada),

¹³⁶ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962, 8.*

and AIRFMFPAC was established to prevent delays from withdrawing Class V stocks because of the limitations on the storage at the respective POEs.¹³⁷ This was due to the maximum amounts of ammunition that can be staged at a given time at each port prior to loading. It was quite a balancing act to choreograph the timing for the loading of ammunition on ships, the withdrawal of class V and Va stocks from Hawthorne and Fallbrooke, and the transit time and arrival of convoys at the POEs. Beyond the challenge of coordinating the withdrawal, transit, staging, and storage, other problems with ammunition embarkation persisted.

One of those problems was associated with the lack of any aviation ordnance personnel assigned to the 5th MEB staff. Because the brigade lacked an assigned expert or any personnel trained on the handling of Class Va all questions had to be referred to the CG, AIRFMFPAC and ultimately delaying deliveries and loading on assault shipping. By 25 October, the class Va loading problems were so significant that it became apparent to the staff that the brigade would not complete its loading and mount-out within the directed 96 hours if it were to load all class Va called for in the planned documents.¹³⁸ Late in the day on 24 October, General Fairbourn advised the Commanding Officer, Naval Ammunition Depot Hawthorne, that if the Class Va stocks were not all completely at the POE by the next morning, it would likely have to be loaded in follow-on shipping and would not be able to be loaded on the assault shipping.¹³⁹ In order to complete the

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 11.

¹³⁹ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 8.

mount-out within 96 hours, another way of getting all the requisite class Va stocks to sea would have to be arranged.

Another delay in loading was the result of embarkation officers failing to complete the required loading plans in times specified within the planning documents. Reports from those embarkation officers indicated difficulties in reconciling landing plan serials (i.e., the assault wave plans) that were being changed during the embarkation with the loading plans that had not been adjusted to support the new landing plan serials. Because of the discrepancies, instructions had been issued not to commence loading the ships until the plans were reconciled and available at the ship. According to Amphibious Group-Three (PHIBGRU-3) records, the first ship to commence loading was the USS *Bayfield* at 2345Z on 23 October, over 32 hours since the JCS had ordered the 5th MEB to begin loading and eight hours after the official formal dispatch ordering the 5th MEB to mount-out had been received. Over the next two days loading was sporadic as the initial supplies arriving at the POEs were in the incorrect sequence or were the wrong quantity specified.¹⁴⁰

As the volume of supplies built up at the POEs, the pace of loading increased significantly. However, due to the delays in the arrival of Class V supplies combined with the changes to loading plans, the loading of some ships would become unbalanced and force embark personnel to load substitute items to remain on their desired schedule. During the 5th MEB planning phases well before activation, the delivery and loading of the Class V stocks was considered to be the most crucial aspect of loading and

¹⁴⁰ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 11.

completing the mount-out within the 96 hour allotment. Several conferences had been held with the representatives of the holding facilities to identify ways to streamline the Class V problem, but at the time the brigade was activated, no significant resolution to issue had been reached. As part of the mount-out procedures from activation to departure, embarkation progress reports were required to be submitted at four hour intervals from each embarkation team. When it became evident on 25 October that the class Va loading would not be completed in time, the COMPHIBPAC, Vice Admiral Howard A. Yeager, expressed concern to the CINCPACFLT, Admiral John H. Sides, regarding the slow start in the loading of 5th MEB and the fact that the ships were already “topped off” and ready to sail as soon as the 5th MEB was embarked.¹⁴¹ Clearly, Admiral Yeager did not want to take the brunt of the blame if the 5th MEB failed to be underway within the 96 hour limitation. At that time, the estimate for completion of all loading for the 5th MEB was 0200Z on 28 October, 10 hours after the mount-out deadline. Shortly after COMPHIBPAC’s concerns were raised to CINCPACFLT, General Fairbourn received permission to depart without all planned stocks of Class Va if it would hinder completion of the mount-out within 96 hours.¹⁴² Around that same time, the JCS directed that 5th MEB set sail as soon as ready.¹⁴³

In contrast to the supply issues, the staging and loading operations for the brigade’s troops and equipment appeared to be going smoothly and without significant

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴² Ibid., 11.

¹⁴³ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 8

difficulty. At 1100 local on 26 October, RLT-1 closed down its command post at San Mateo aboard Camp Pendleton and two hours later was established aboard the USS *Henrico*. That same day, 5th MEB began echeloning its headquarters to the POE with the Bravo Command Group departing at 0730 and establishing itself aboard the USS *Eldorado* a couple hours later. At 1030, the 5th MEB command post aboard Camp Pendleton was closed down and the Alpha Command Group displaced to the POE. At 1115 local, the new 5th MEB command post was established aboard the USS *Eldorado*.¹⁴⁴

After arriving to the USS *Eldorado*, the brigade staff discovered that the command ship's limited billeting space would not accommodate all their personnel and a considerable number of the 5th MEB headquarters would have to be embarked on other ships. In several cases, sections had to be split up among different ships making effective coordination and efficient functioning of those sections very difficult. The G-1 section was perhaps the hardest hit, with the postal, disbursing, information services, and the Secret and Classified files sections all splintered and scattered on other ships.¹⁴⁵ With the arrival of the 5th MEB command post on the USS *Eldorado*, the embarkation of the brigade was nearing completion.

Over the course of the mount-out, not only did the brigade's units travel to the POE utilizing their own organic equipment and transportation from as far off as Twenty-nine Palms, California (140 miles from the POE), but augmentation support would be

¹⁴⁴ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 12.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

employed to round out the complete movement of the brigade to the POE. Those additional support requirements would utilize 476 vehicles to transport over 6,000 personnel, over 13,000 tons of bulk cargo and ammunition, and 158 pieces of special use and heavy equipment to support the mount-out of all the brigade's personnel and equipment. In all, nearly 120,000 miles were driven, often in hectic conditions as embark officers and unit leaders pushed to keep the planning timeline, and as testament to the focus and dedication of the Marines and Sailors involved in and supporting the mount-out of the brigade, only one minor accident was reported during the entire mount-out operation.¹⁴⁶

At 1648Z on 27 October, General Fairbourn reported to CINCLANT that the 5th MEB had completed loading at 1600Z - 96 hours after official notification. Shortly thereafter, at 1710Z, COMPHIBPAC reported to CINCPACFLT that PHIBGRU-3 ships with 5th MEB embarked had completed loading, commenced movement from pier side, and had cleared the harbor.¹⁴⁷ The 5th MEB was now under the operational control of the Commander, Amphibious Group-3 (COMPHIBGRU-3) and sailing south towards Panama.¹⁴⁸ Estimated time for arrival at Balboa, Panama for transit east was 5 November 1962, nine days later. The staff described the attitude and morale of all aboard as

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 12.

¹⁴⁸ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 8.

excellent and they expressed confidence that the brigade could handle any of tasks expected to be assigned.¹⁴⁹

However, that confidence would be short-lived. After a few days being underway, the brigade discovered that numerous deviations from the original loading plan had occurred. These were due to the haste in which the loading the ships occurred to complete the mount-out deadline. These digressions created significant doubt within the staff about the ability of the brigade to execute the landing plans in existence at that time. In order to ascertain what changes to serial assignments, sequences, and landing schedules were needed, the brigade required all subordinate units to update the brigade headquarters with accurate details of how their load plans now differed. Over the next few days, the brigade headquarters compiled these details and the required changes to the landing plan were ascertained and completed.¹⁵⁰

With the updates to the brigade landing plan completed and disseminated to appropriate supporting and supported commands, the brigade staff could now focus on analyzing the totality of the shortfalls encountered in the logistics section, specifically, the shortfalls in Class V and Va as well as approximately 100 short tons of brigade supplies. Brigade Logistics Officer, Lieutenant Colonel W. D. Wilcox, was able to make up for the shortfalls in two ways. The first solution was to have MATS aircraft deliver the needed supplies to the Canal Zone and then load it on assault shipping when the brigade transited. The second solution was to have the material that MATS could not fly to the

¹⁴⁹ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 12.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

Canal Zone or which could not be loaded on assault shipping, to be loaded in follow-on shipping provided by the Military Sea Transportation Service (MSTS). The USNS *Constitution State* was assigned by MSTS to provide the lift of those supplies for 5th MEB and FMFPAC assumed the responsibility for coordinating and supervising the loading operations.¹⁵¹

On 31 October, COMPHIBGRU-3 provided the list of ships scheduled to transit the Canal, as well as the requested order they be permitted to journey through the Canal to the Commander, Fifteen Naval District, the Navy's administrative command that oversees operations in the Panama Canal Zone. COMPHIBGRU-3 also requested that the transit be expedited for all ships in order to support the contingency operation. Additionally, pier space was requested for certain ships within the task force to permit the loading of those logistics materials that Lieutenant Colonel Wilcox had coordinated previously.¹⁵²

By 2 November, the situation in Cuba was considerably more confusing to the brigade staff, as they had now learned that the Soviets agreed to remove from Cuba the "offensive" weapons described by Kennedy in his 22 October speech to the nation and international tensions now appeared to be lessening. The advanced state of readiness that now existed for all ground forces involved in OPLAN 316 was expected to be maintained for 60 days. CG, FMFLANT asked General Fairbourn for an estimate on how long the brigade's current readiness could be maintained to support CINCLANT, as well as how

¹⁵¹ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 14.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 15.

long it would take to return to their current high level if the brigade was given a stand down in order to complete maintenance and training. General Fairbourn, although not providing a firm number of days the brigade could be kept at its current readiness level, responded that it would drop in direct proportion to the amount of time they remained continually at sea. However, General Fairbourn did indicate he felt an acceptable level of readiness could be maintained for at least 60 days if up to 50 percent of the brigade was permitted to conduct training on the island of Vieques at a given time.¹⁵³

As the brigade approached the Canal, General Fairborne and his staff were now facing the possibility that they might not transit immediately into the execution of OPLAN 316 and began to consider what other problems might be encountered in association with the long periods at sea contemplated to maintain the desired state of readiness for CINCLANT.¹⁵⁴ On 5 November, control of the task group was transferred from CINCPAC to CINCLANT and further sub-assigned to the control of Commander, Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet (COMPHIBLANT). That same day, the COMPHIBGRU-3 and the CG, 5th MEB, as well as members of their staffs were flown to Norfolk, Virginia to participate in a conference being held by Admiral Dennison and CG, FMFLANT for subsequent operations in the Caribbean theater.¹⁵⁵

Although tensions with the Soviet Union and Cuba were showing signs of lessening somewhat, Admiral Dennison still had to maintain his readiness posture to

¹⁵³ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 18 Oct-5 Nov 1962*, 15.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

execute OPLANs 312 and 316 on short notice and continued to refine the details for those plans. By this point, the brigade's shortcomings in their mount-out had been generally rectified and the staff focused on refining their portions of OPLAN 316 and other joint operations in preparation for their arrival in the Caribbean theater.

On the surface, the 5th MEB mount-out can be generally assessed as a great success. However, since the unit was not employed in combat, readers can only guess as to how the shortfalls of class V and Va, the equipment left for follow-on MSTs shipping, the botched loading of the original landing plans, or the deficiencies in other administrative and logistical areas would have affected the actual invasion and follow-on operations ashore. Additionally, the 96-hour requirement is derived from official notification to being ready to sail. Yet in this case, the 5th MEB headquarters was activated a full three and a half days before the brigade was ordered to activate, load, and sail. Again, all West Coast supply agencies were notified two and half days prior to the official 5th MEB activation order of the strong possibility that the 5th MEB would activate.

The brigade was informed by telephone of their activation order almost a full 24 hours prior to the official, hand-carried JCS dispatch being received by CG, 1st MARDIV. At 1600z on 23 October 1962. The official command diaries of the 5th MEB, II MEF, and CINCLANT all reference the brigade completing its mount-out within the 96-hour reaction time numerous times and point to this case as a proof of concept and a testament to the Marine Corps' status as the nation's force-in-readiness. However, it seems disingenuous to represent that the brigade completed this short-notice mount-out within 96 hours, when the truth is the brigade failed to embark all equipment, ammunition, and

one hundred tons of supplies that would be expected within the timeframe. Furthermore, the brigade had advanced warning of the activation and mount-out to the tune of nearly four days.

Nevertheless, the 5th MEB still got underway in a timely manner when officially ordered. The brigade had figured out how to mitigate deficiencies arising from the loading of the ships and most important, 5th MEB was ready to execute any assigned mission from CINCLANT when it arrived in the Caribbean. Owing to the fact that loading a brigade of Marines today is not likely to be done except in an actual crisis, the lessons that can be learned from the mount-out of the 5th MEB provides an excellent opportunity for any staff officer or leader to reflect on and improve their skills in embarkation and amphibious operations without ever getting the chance to step out on to a pier. Having gotten the 5th MEB on their ships and out the door, the next chapter will explore the developments and details of the CINCLANT contingency plans that would take the 5th MEB on to the shores of Cuba as part the largest U.S. amphibious forces to be underway since World War II.

CHAPTER 4

READY FOR WAR: INVASION PLANS AND THE PROLONGED ALERT

Evolution of the Cuban Contingency Plans

Before beginning an overview of those OPLANS it is important to understand the overall command structure that existed for the U.S. military at the time of the crisis, as it was somewhat different than what most readers might be familiar with in today's military command structure. For hostilities in the Caribbean, the JCS designated Admiral Dennison, CINCLANT, as the unified commander that would have the responsibility to plan and, if necessary, execute any operations for Cuban contingencies.¹⁵⁶ In addition to his duties as CINCLANT, Admiral Dennison was also the CINCLANTFLT, which functioned as the service headquarters for the Navy and Marine Corps forces assigned to the Atlantic Command.¹⁵⁷

During stateside peacetime operations, Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps units normally belonged to their respective service component for all training and administration. However, during deployment Army and Air Force units would fall underneath U.S. Strike Command (STRICOM) for processing and be provided to the appropriate unified command for wartime operations, while Marine Corps forces would be provided to the appropriate naval command, such as the Atlantic Fleet in this case.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Adam Yarmolinsky, "Department of Defense Operations During the Cuban Crisis," *Naval War College Review* 32 (July/August 1979): 89.

¹⁵⁷ Barlow.

¹⁵⁸ House, 93.

To support STRICOM, the Army and Air Force each had a service headquarters that conducted the administrative, training, and doctrinal responsibilities that were not expressly appointed to STRICOM authority.¹⁵⁹

The Army's service headquarters supporting STRICOM was the Continental Army Command (CONARC) and the Air Force headquarters was known as Tactical Air Command (TAC). Once allocated forces actually deployed, operational control would pass to the appropriate unified command. Since the Atlantic Command did not have any standing component headquarters for the Army and Air Force, CONARC and TAC would assume the roles of Army Component, Atlantic (ARLANT) and Air Force Component, Atlantic (AFLANT), respectively, once forces were transferred to the control of Atlantic Command.¹⁶⁰ The impact of this command relationship, CONARC/ARLANT and TAC/AFLANT having to report to both STRICOM and CINCLANT, would strain the coordination between forces as the scramble to prepare for possible war in Cuba.¹⁶¹ The depth of these problems will be explored in detail later in this chapter during the analysis of the mobilization and preparation of forces to execute the Cuban Contingency Plans.

Prior to 1959, the year Castro seized power in Cuba, the Atlantic Command's contingency planning efforts for disturbances or hostilities in a sub-area such as the Caribbean were essentially nonexistent. The command had basic general war plans

¹⁵⁹ House, 93.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 98.

prepared, but these were meant for large-scale war against the most likely threat at the time—the Soviet Union. For possible operations of a more restricted scope, however, the Atlantic Command had prepared little for such contingencies. Up to this point, the general assessment by the National Security Council was that Latin America and the Caribbean appeared peaceful enough that no need existed to develop any sort of operational plan at this time.¹⁶² In spite of Castro’s seizure of power in Cuba and in contrast to how government policy was oriented towards other areas like Asia, the Middle East, and Europe; the National Security Council still treated the Caribbean as a single entity regarding threats to national security. Specifically, in late February 1959, the National Security Council noted, “None of the Latin American nations faces an immediate threat of overt Communist aggression or takeover.”¹⁶³ The Atlantic Command held the same viewpoint as the National Security Council and no immediate change to the command’s contingency plans occurred because of Castro’s assumption of power.¹⁶⁴

In December 1959, Director of Plans on the General Staff of the Army, Major General J. K. Woolnough, in a memorandum to the JCS, asserted that the contingency plans in existence were so generalized in nature that they were totally inadequate for use by the operating forces in a more narrow or specific situation, such as Cuba. It appears that the JCS were already thinking along the same lines as General Woolnough. In fact,

¹⁶² Richard Kugler, “The Army’s Role in the Cuban Crisis: 1962” (OCMH-78, OCMH Historical Monograph, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Fort McNair, DC, 1963), III-2.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 3, quoted in NSC 5902/1, incl. to JCS 1976/226 (25 Feb 1959).

¹⁶⁴ Kugler, III-3.

the month prior, the JCS had directed CINCLANT to prepare a contingency plan that would specifically provide for a possible armed intervention in Cuba.¹⁶⁵

Admiral Wright and his staff, just a few months prior, had begun developing two contingency plans that contained at least some stipulations for operations against Cuba. The first plan was focused on responding to an act of aggression by Cuba or Venezuela on a neighboring nation or island, such as Haiti or the Dominican Republic. The second plan was much broader, but not to the point of full-scale general war. This plan was not focused on any particular nation and generally applied to the whole area of the Caribbean, although the plan did have an annex that covered operations in Cuba. However, neither of these plans had been reviewed or approved by the JCS at the end of 1959.¹⁶⁶

To conduct the type of operation the JCS desired in their November directive, CINCLANT believed that a joint task force would be necessary. Admiral Wright's initial concept would place the task force under the Commander of the U.S. Second Fleet (COMSECONDFLT) with component task forces available from the Army, Air Force, and Navy. The CG of the XVIII Airborne Corps, based out of Fort Bragg, North Carolina, would lead and be the primary planning agent for the Army element within the task force. COMSECONDFLT would be the lead for the Navy element and the 19th Air Force would be the lead for the Air Force element.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., III-5, quoted in Msg, JCS to CINCLANT, JCS 968022, 6 Nov 1959.

¹⁶⁶ Kugler, III-4.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., III-5.

According to the plan developed in November and December 1959, and published January 1960 by XVIII Airborne Corps, the Army component's mission would be to seize, by airborne assault, two major airfields near Havana, the Jose Marti International Airport and Batista Airfield. Then, the force would advance overland to capture objectives in the city of Havana, including the port of Regla and harbor fortifications at Morro Castle. The size of the force was just two reinforced airborne battle groups¹⁶⁸ and would be under the command and control of the 82d Airborne Division. XVIII Airborne Corps felt the force was adequate for the mission at the time, however, if further operations were necessary, an additional surface echelon would be brought in via the port at Regla. Once the surface echelon was ashore, the force would head east and link-up with the U.S. Marines advancing west from the Guantanamo Naval Base. This plan was designated STRAC OPLAN 51-59 (Standards in Training Commission Operational Plan), subordinate to COMSECONDFLT OPLAN 310/2-59, which in turn, supported CINCLANT OPLAN 310-59.¹⁶⁹

On 28 February 1962, Admiral Dennison assumed command as CINCLANT and continued to review and update the contingency plans relating to Cuba. The majority of subsequent changes are largely reflections of incremental increases in the size of the force allocated for the operation. For instance, in the month immediately following the

¹⁶⁸ By 1959, all three airborne divisions in the Army (the 11th, 82nd, and 101st) had been reorganized under the Pentomic Division structure, officially known as Reorganization of the Airborne Division. Each airborne division was formed around five battle groups, with each battle group containing five infantry companies, a headquarters and service company, and a mortar battery.

¹⁶⁹ Kugler, III-6.

publication of STRAC OPLAN 51-59, XVIII Airborne Corps added a light armored cavalry squadron from the 2nd Armored Division to the follow-on air echelon flown into the airfields once secured. The next big change came in May 1960 when Admiral Dennison requested the entirety of the 82nd Airborne Division be incorporated as the principle invasion force. The 82nd Airborne Division, minus the two battle groups originally identified for commitment in STRAC OPLAN 51-59, was already the on-call reserve for the Army task force involved and, because it required a significantly larger commitment from the Air Force in support aircraft, required permission from the JCS.¹⁷⁰ In the absence of that approval, Admiral Dennison was limited to preparing just an airlift plan for the 82nd Airborne Division, but no modifications to the ground scheme of maneuver at this point were made.¹⁷¹

By the fall of 1960, tensions with Cuba had risen dramatically and the first threats from the Soviet Union against the United States were made regarding retaliations should the United States initiate an intervention in Cuba. In August, Castro had ordered the nationalization of all U.S. property in Cuba. At the United Nations the month following, Castro challenged the status of the treaty that permitted the United States to lease and operate the Naval Base at Guantanamo Bay. The tensions reached a new peak in January 1961, when the U.S. government, no longer willing to tolerate contact with an openly hostile communist regime, severed all diplomatic ties with Cuba.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Pardoe, 21

¹⁷¹ Kugler, III-7.

¹⁷² Ibid., III-8, quoted in “U.S. Policy toward Cuba and Related Events, 1903-May 1961,” by OCMH.

Meanwhile, the Cuban Army had been rebuilding and, with the assistance of the Soviets, steadily growing their arsenal of communist-bloc weapons and increasing their capabilities in conventional warfare. The current OPLANs did not seem adequate in the face of the new estimates of Cuban capabilities and a much larger force would be needed by CINCLANT. In December 1960, Admiral Dennison held a planning conference that brought together representatives from the Army's CONARC, the Air Force's TAC, the Navy's 2nd Fleet and Atlantic Amphibious Force, and the Marine Corps' FMFLANT to address the challenge of invading Cuba. The conference concluded with two concepts for more detailed consideration to follow that were similarly based off previous plans.¹⁷³

The first concept was essentially a beefed up version of STRAC OPLAN 51-59: airborne forces would still seize key objectives around Havana and open the port of Regla for a surface echelon. The second concept included the airborne assault, but also called for a simultaneous amphibious assault. Admiral Dennison made no decision on which concept would become the primary OPLAN and directed subordinate commanders to draft plans for both concepts, noting that the forces needed to be larger now to address the now more capable Cuban adversary.¹⁷⁴

After Admiral Dennison's conference, subordinate headquarters staffs actively engaged in contingency planning that would cover each command's own subordinate units. However, XVIII Airborne Corps headquarters noted that because of the absence of

¹⁷³ Kugler, III-9.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

a completed plan from CINCLANT, planning by subordinate commands was a chaotic process with poor coordination between the staffs involved. By the end of the month, however, Admiral Dennison had published CINCLANT OPLAN 312-61 addressing the airborne only concept from the conference that provided enough details and an approved task organization that allowed subordinate staffs to conduct more detailed contingency planning.¹⁷⁵ Despite the fact that the JTF-122 did not publish its own joint OPLAN until late April, the headquarters staff for XVIII Airborne Corps was able to complete its plans to cover each concept outlined by Admiral Dennison at the January conference.¹⁷⁶

The Army element in CINCLANT OPLAN 312-61 was now designated as Task Force 125 (TF 125) and consisted of the entire 82nd Airborne Division, reinforced with an infantry brigade, an armored cavalry regiment, a medium tank battalion, and an artillery battalion. OPLAN 312-61 indicated that only three of the division's battle groups could be airlifted for the initial assault, but did not specify how the remainder of the division would be landed, whether via air at the seized airfields, surface shipping at the seized port, or a separate amphibious assault. At this point in planning, the headquarters staff for XVIII Airborne Corps made a few assumptions. First, because evidence of Soviet-built tanks in Cuba was now available, the staff concluded that a swift introduction of U.S. armor and heavy artillery for the force was now compulsory. Second, because of this necessity to get armor ashore quickly, an amphibious assault would be needed in addition to the airborne assault. The amphibious assault would permit

¹⁷⁵ Kugler, III-10.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., III-9, quoted in "The Role of the XVIII Airborne Corps in the Cuban Crisis," II-1 to II-12.

the heavier armor and artillery systems to be brought in over the beaches either simultaneously with or soon after the airborne landings.¹⁷⁷

Based on the limited airlift for just three reinforced battle groups and the assumption of simultaneous amphibious assault, the headquarters staff for XVIII Airborne Corps completed STRAC OPLAN 53-61, which consisted of the following scheme of maneuver. Two of the battle groups would retain the mission of conducting an airborne assault to seize the airfields near Havana as previously outlined in STRAC OPLAN 51-59 and the third battle group would conduct an airborne assault near Regla in order to more quickly seize the port as opposed to a force moving overland from the Havana airfields. Concurrent with the air drops, an infantry brigade would make an amphibious assault at Tarara, about 10 miles east of Havana in order to allow the armored cavalry, tank battalion, and artillery battalion to follow over the beach. The XVIII Airborne staff felt the airborne only concept of operations was not sufficient to quickly seize Havana and, in theory, overthrow the Castro regime.¹⁷⁸

No sooner had the headquarters staff of the XVIII Airborne Corps published STRAC OPLAN 53-61 that the situation in Cuba would change again. The failed invasion attempt at the Bay of Pigs and Castro's surprising display of military strength in response in April 1961 led Admiral Dennison to again update his estimate of Cuban military strength and issue OPLAN 312-61 (Revised) that significantly increased not only the role of the Air Force in the operation, but increased considerably the ground forces

¹⁷⁷ Kugler, III-11.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

involved.¹⁷⁹ The Air Force was now tasked to conduct a large-scale bombing campaign in advance in order to neutralize the Cuban Air Force and destroy significant ground targets before the airborne and amphibious assaults occurred. The timeline provided for air attacks was identified as a minimum of four days of bombing and up to a maximum of 18 days before the assault by troops against the island.¹⁸⁰ Essentially, on the order to execute, the Air Force would begin their air campaign as the Army mobilized its invasion forces at the staging bases in the United States and once the appropriate pre-invasion conditions were met, the simultaneous airborne and amphibious assault would be ordered.

As mentioned, the increase in the allocation for ground forces supporting CINCLANT OPLAN 312-61 (Revised) was substantial. Regarding the biggest combat forces, the plan now called for the employment of two entire airborne divisions, the 101st and 82nd, as well as for elements of the 2nd MARDIV to conduct an amphibious assault. The Army component still included an infantry brigade in the surface echelon and increased the armored cavalry regiment with a combat command from the 1st Armored Division. Along with the increase in the forces allocated, the mission and objectives expanded as well. Two key objectives added were the seizure of the port of Mariel, approximately 25 miles west of Havana, by an amphibious force and the capture of the Baracoa Airfield, just a few miles west of Havana, by the second airborne division now assigned. The staffs of the major subordinate commands, XVIII Airborne Corps and

¹⁷⁹ Pardoe, 29; Kugler, III-12.

¹⁸⁰ Pardoe, 29.

FMFLANT, renewed their detailed planning necessary for their new roles in the revised OPLAN 312-61.¹⁸¹

Just one month later in July 1961, as subordinate staffs had barely begun the detailed planning for OPLAN 312-61 (Revised), CINCLANT published an additional contingency plan for Cuba that contained even more ground combat forces. This plan, CINCLANT OPLAN 314-61, called for even more Army forces to participate. The revised plan published by XXVIII Airborne Corps was identified as STRAC OPLAN 55-61.¹⁸² This plan's general concepts, although revised and updated several times between July 1961 and October 1962, would be the core invasion plan around which combat forces supporting CINCLANT would mobilize in support of when the Cuban crisis began in mid-October 1962.¹⁸³

As Admiral Dennison continued to add details and refine the invasion plans for Cuba throughout the fall and winter of 1961, he recognized that the Air Force and Army plans needed to be better coordinated, as both services were planning their staging and support plans at the same locations. Admiral Dennison directed the Army Staging Area Command to assess the ability of Air Force bases at Homestead, McCoy, McDill, and Patrick to support both the Army's invasion plans and the Air Force's bombing campaign, in addition to their airlift requirements for airborne operations against Cuba. The survey revealed that the Army was not properly coordinating their needs with the Air

¹⁸¹ Kugler, III-12.

¹⁸² Pardoe, 31.

¹⁸³ Kugler, III-12.

Force at these locations and that both services saw the bases as critical to their operations.¹⁸⁴ This failure by the Army and Air Force to de-conflict their resource and space requirements at the planned staging bases would cause significant problems during the mobilization of forces in October 1962 and ultimately require intervention from the JCS to resolve.¹⁸⁵

On 21 October 1961, Admiral Dennison had added a third contingency plan, OPLAN 316-61, to the other two updated contingency plans now known as OPLANS 312-61 and 314-61.¹⁸⁶ OPLAN 316-61 was developed as a “quick reaction” plan for Cuba and as an alternative to OPLAN 314-61 for execution on a much shorter notice, five days instead of the 18 required for OPLAN 314-61.¹⁸⁷ OPLAN 316-61 anticipated the eventual employment of the same forces, but with the airborne and amphibious portions becoming separate phases of the operation and the introduction of troops on Cuba more spread out in time. With the short notice of five days, the Marines Corps assault forces would not be able to load and deploy by sea to make an assault, so the initial assault would be limited to the airborne drop of two reinforced airborne divisions from the XVIII Airborne Corps around Havana and the employment of any Marine units already at sea or

¹⁸⁴ Pardoe, 31, quoted in “Operational Narrative, Cuban Emergency, United States 3rd Army, 26 June 1963,” Appendix 6 (Quartermaster) to Annex C (Logistics), U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC, 2.

¹⁸⁵ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 62.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 21; Kugler, III-16.

¹⁸⁷ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 20; House, 95.

aboard Guantanamo Bay. As soon as feasible, but not more than three days after the airborne drops, the follow-on amphibious assault would commence.¹⁸⁸

In February 1962, the JCS directed Admiral Dennison to make planning for the Cuban contingency his command's highest priority.¹⁸⁹ As planning intensified, Admiral Dennison soon issued a significant update to his contingency plans. In the first major change, OPLAN 312-61 was cancelled and replaced by OPLAN 312-62 and was drastically different in its fundamental concept. OPLAN 312-62 no longer contained invasion plan details, as those were now fully addressed in OPLANs 314 and 316. Instead, OPLAN 312-62 was now a separate air campaign that could be conducted completely independent of any decision to invade.¹⁹⁰ More significantly, the plan provided for the rapid response of U.S. air power against Cuba from a no warning condition, avoiding timely marshalling of forces to staging area, with the first attacks beginning within 12 hours after the order to execute was given. OPLAN 312-62 was also scalable, providing a variety of options ranging from attacking a single target up to a large-scale attack to achieve air superiority over the island.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ Kugler, III-17; Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 20.

¹⁸⁹ House, 94.

¹⁹⁰ Kugler, III-15.

¹⁹¹ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 17-19.

Meanwhile, OPLAN 314-61, originally issued by Admiral Dennison on 22 July 1961, continued to be reviewed and amended with additional details and new annexes.¹⁹² The general concept of OPLAN 314-61 called for deliberate and coordinated amphibious and airborne assaults of the island, with the XVIII Airborne Corps seizing four airfields around the Havana area and the Marines landing on the eastern side of Cuba. The forces would seize key objectives, move to control the island, and ultimately overthrow the Castro regime.¹⁹³ A key assumption to OPLAN 314-61 was that it would be preceded by the execution of an extensive air campaign outlined in the newly published OPLAN 312-62. With no preparation or prior marshalling of forces, OPLAN 314-61 called for an interval of 18 days between the time the decision was made to execute and the actual assault.¹⁹⁴

In February 1962, one of the new annexes added was designed to shorten this reaction time down to just four days by conducting extensive prepositioning of combat forces and supplies. This plan, Annex G, was referred to as 314-GOLF. When CINCLANT added 314-GOLF to OPLAN 314-61, it was anticipated that the sizable projection of power by the U.S. military might result in the overthrow of the Castro government by the Cuban people.¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, as the year progressed, the size of the force in OPLAN 314-61 continued to grow in response to the persistently increasing

¹⁹² Kugler, III-16.

¹⁹³ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 20; House, 95.

¹⁹⁴ Kugler, III-16.

¹⁹⁵ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 20.

estimate of Cuba's military capabilities, due in large part to the strong support the Soviets provided. As a result, the soundness of the both the four-day reaction time and the assumption of the Cuban people rising up against Castro seemed increasingly improbable.¹⁹⁶

In similar fashion to 314-GOLF, Admiral Dennison added an annex to OPLAN 316-61 that could reduce the reaction time of the airborne only assault to as quick as two days with the prepositioning of units and supplies.¹⁹⁷ The crucial difference between the two plans, 314-61 and 316-61, was the degree of urgency needed by the JCS and the degree of opposition that existed on Cuba. For the JCS, each plan was envisioned to be used for a particular set of anticipated circumstances. If time was available and other factors were equal, OPLAN 314-61 was the preferred course of action. It permitted the greatest buildup of combat power and mitigated risk to the airborne forces with the simultaneous amphibious assault, but required a significant build up time that allowed for actions by the enemy to be taken. However, if Cuba were discovered to be harboring offensive Soviet weapons, the JCS favored immediately executing OPLAN 312-62, followed quickly thereafter by OPLAN 314-61. The utilization of OPLAN 316-61 was intended to be a quick response operation to a popular uprising in Cuba in which the United States desired to assist in without any delay. On the eve of the Cuban Missile

¹⁹⁶ Kugler, III-16.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., III-18.

Crisis, the JCS believed that another alternative and a way to reduce the risk associated with these plans was to somehow compress the reaction time for OPLAN 314-61.¹⁹⁸

To summarize, the OPLANs on hand for Admiral Dennison on 1 October 1962 when he directed subordinate commanders to begin taking measures to ensure maximum readiness to support the Cuban contingency operations were: (1) OPLAN 312-62 (a quick reaction, scalable air campaign); (2) OPLAN 314-61 (deliberate simultaneous airborne and amphibious assault on 18-day notice); and (3) OPLAN 316-61 (quick reaction airborne drop on five day notice with amphibious assault shortly thereafter). On 4 October, Admiral Dennison published Change 20 to Annex D, (Intelligence), to OPLAN 314-61 that incorporated the identification of the Komar-class anti-ship missile boats in Cuba that improved the enemy's air defenses and long-range shore defenses.¹⁹⁹ Just over a week later on 13 October, Admiral Dennison modified OPLAN 312-62 by removing Joint Task Force 122 (JTF-122) from the task organization. CINCLANT would now direct each service component directly vice through a subordinate task force for the execution of the anticipated air campaign.²⁰⁰ Meanwhile, significant prepositioning of units and supply stocks continued by the assault forces in preparation for execution of the three contingency plans.

The discovery of ballistic missiles sites in Cuba on 14 October would abruptly change the status and priorities of the contingency plans for Cuba. The JCS now

¹⁹⁸ Kugler, III-19; Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 45.

¹⁹⁹ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 40.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 46.

emphasized speed. Even with the capability of 314-GOLF to compress the timeline for the execution of OPLAN 314-61, it was not geared for the pressing circumstances which now existed. Based on the current enemy estimate, as well as the increased complexity and risk associated with attempting to compress the timetable and tempo to a quicker pace, the JCS considered the most sound course of action to be the execution of OPLAN 316-61 with its firm and quicker movement schedules already completed.²⁰¹

Accordingly, on 17 October, the JCS directed Admiral Dennison to bring all units designated in OPLAN 316-61 to the “highest state of readiness for possible execution.”²⁰² Even with maximum preparation for forces, a gap still existed between the airborne drops and the follow-on amphibious assault. The next day, the JCS directed Admiral Dennison to make two fundamental changes to OPLAN 316-61 to resolve this gap. The first change was to replace the sequential airborne and amphibious assaults with the concept set forth in OPLAN 314-61, simultaneous airborne and amphibious assaults. The second change aimed at enabling the first change by postponing the commencement of the assaults from the fifth to the seventh day after the order to execute was given. This would allow more time to assemble and embark the amphibious forces, as well as providing the Air Force and Navy additional time to complete the attacks outlined in OPLAN 312-62.²⁰³ Additionally, Admiral Dennison noted that the extra two days would

²⁰¹ Kugler, III-22.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Kugler, III-23; Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 21.

permit a margin for delays that might occur due to weather or other unforeseen problems moving combat forces into position.²⁰⁴

On 20 October, as he had for OPLAN 312-62, Admiral Dennison removed JTF-122 from the task organization for OPLANs 314-61 and 314-61. Under the new command relationship, Admiral Dennison would task the subordinate service component task forces directly. Accordingly, the CG, XVIII Airborne Corps remained as the Commander Army Task Force, the Commander Amphibious Force, U.S. Atlantic Fleet remained as the Commander Naval Task Force, and the Commander 19th Air Force remained as Commander Air Task Force (see figure 2).²⁰⁵

Despite the fact that the JCS had directed Admiral Dennison to bring all units to the highest state of readiness for the execution of OPLAN 316-61 and even with the changes that made it now a simultaneous airborne and amphibious assault, subordinate plans staffs continued to consider and prepare for OPLAN 314-61 as well.²⁰⁶ In order to eliminate the possibility of further confusion between the now more similar, yet still distinct plans, the JCS approved a request by Admiral Dennison to abandon any further planning and preparation for OPLAN 314-61 and focus exclusively on refining and preparing for OPLAN 316.²⁰⁷ Furthermore, to avoid confusion with the previous five-day

²⁰⁴ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 21.

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 22-23.

²⁰⁶ Kugler, III-24.

²⁰⁷ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 21.

quick reaction version of OPLAN 316-61, the JCS directed that the new seven-day simultaneous airborne and amphibious assault version be designated OPLAN 316-62.²⁰⁸

At the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis, considered by most to be 27 October 1962 (the day U.S. Air Force Major Rudolf Anderson was shot down and killed in a U-2 flight over Cuba), Admiral Dennison and his combat forces were intensely preparing to execute OPLANs 312-62 and 316-62. These plans had transformed significantly from the first contingency plan drafted specifically for Cuba in January 1960 that envisioned just two airborne battle groups dropping around Havana—a mere 10 infantry companies. On 27 October 1962, the Army and Marine Corps had over 100,000 combat troops poised to invade Cuba in the first five days after the assault, as well as several hundred thousand more in combat support and combat service support roles.

This continuous adaptation and adjustments in planning lends itself to well-deserved praise for the staffs at Atlantic Command, XVIII Airborne Corps, FMFLANT, TAC and all other staffs that supported the development of the many contingency plans over the years. The near constant revisions and updates are an indication that these staffs were continuously reassessing threat, reframing the operating environment, and adjusting the plan as needed. It is a common adage within the combat arms of the military services that intelligence drives operations, and in the case of the development of the Cuban Contingency Plans, this was confirmed true.

The next sub-section of this chapter will examine in greater detail CINCLANT's two primary contingency plans, OPLANs 312-62 and 316-62, as they existed on 27

²⁰⁸ Kugler, III-24.

October, as well as investigate the problems encountered with preparing forces to execute these plans. Specific emphasis will be placed on the 5th MEB and the various branch plans the brigade had to prepare for to support OPLAN 316-62. Lastly, the lessons learned from the near execution of these plans shall be reviewed to conclude the chapter.

Readying to Attack

Prior to the execution of the amphibious and airborne assaults of OPLAN 316-62, OPLAN 312-62, the large-scale air campaign, would be completed approximately 24 hours prior to D-Day of OPLAN 316-62 and the command and control relationships would shift those outlined in OPLAN 316-62.²⁰⁹ Prior to delving into the details of the invasion plan outlined in OPLAN 316-62, it is important to review the aspects of OPLAN 312-62, as well as what options and flexibility it provided Admiral Dennison and the JCS in supporting the nation's objectives.

As previously mentioned, OPLAN 312-62 was scalable in nature and had three categories of employment based on mission needs and the desired effects. The categories were each assigned a code name for common usage. OPLAN 312-62, Category I was identified by its code name as Fire Hose. Fire Hose called for the selective destruction of a SAM site or sites as directed by Admiral Dennison. General Sweeney, CINCAFLANT, would serve as the target coordinator and execute operations with his assigned forces when directed.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 22.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

OPLAN 312-62, Category II's code name was Shoe Black. This category expanded air strikes beyond just SAM sites, but was still limited and well short of a full-scale air campaign. Strikes could be conducted against a single target or grouped together by type. For example, typical groups included airfields, SAM sites, enemy aircraft, or missile complexes. General Sweeney would again oversee the strikes as the target coordinator for Shoe Black, but his forces available now included those assigned to the Naval Task Force as well.

OPLAN 312-62, Category III was known by its code name of Scabbards 312. This category called for the execution of the full-scale air campaign against Cuba.²¹¹ If OPLAN 316-62 were to be executed, it would be preceded by the Scabbards 312 version of OPLAN 312-62. The logistical footprint to execute Scabbards 312 was significant and as mentioned, even conflicted with the staging needs of forces outlined to support OPLAN 316-62. To help alleviate the congestion, it became necessary for all military aircraft not included in Scabbards 312 to be temporarily moved elsewhere. In a bit of luck, several TAC elements were already at southern Florida bases on 21 October conducting a large-scale training exercise when the alert to mobilize, position, and prepare forces to execute Scabbards 312 was issued was Admiral Dennison.²¹² On the eve of President Kennedy's speech to the nation announcing the quarantine, TAC already had in excess of 500 aircraft deployed to bases throughout Florida.²¹³

²¹¹ Ibid., 19.

²¹² Ibid.

²¹³ Ibid., Enclosure (1) to Chapter II, 13.

As a much larger operation than Shoe Black, Scabbards 312 also had a more robust command and control relationship. Admiral Dennison, as CINCLANT, would direct and coordinate the air strikes with three subordinate commands: CINCLANTFLT, also commanded by Admiral Dennison, controlled the preponderance of naval aviation; CINCAFLANT, under the command of General Sweeney, contained the Air Force elements; and the Commander Antilles Defense Command, a subordinate unified command under CINCLANT, under the command of Rear Admiral Allen H. Smith, would be responsible for coordinating the air defense of Guantanamo Bay.²¹⁴

The transition to OPLAN 316-62 would be dictated by Admiral Dennison and was intended to occur no later 24 hours prior to the D-Day²¹⁵ established for OPLAN 316-62.²¹⁶ The air attacks directly supporting OPLAN 316-62 would begin on D-Day were focused on supporting the airborne and amphibious assaults. Beginning as far out as 24 hours prior to H-Hour, the invasion beaches, as well as numerous other beaches to deceive the defending Cubans, would be attacked in order to “soften up” the defenses and isolate the objective areas. Meanwhile, any attacks on and around any of the airfields would be limited to only strafing runs until three hours prior to P-Hour, at which point

²¹⁴ Ibid., 19.

²¹⁵ The following letter designated days/hours were established by CINCLANT to coordinate the execution of the planned attacks and assaults: E-Day: the day the plan is ordered executed; D-Day: the day U.S. forces in the plan commence the initial assault in Cuba; H-Hour: time of landing of the first wave of the amphibious assault; L-Hour: time the initial heliborne assault touches down in the landing zone; and P-Hour: time of drop for the first airborne troops. See *Command Diary of FMFLANT and II MEF*, Tab (FFF), page 7 of CINCLANT OPLAN 316-62, Appendix 7 to Enclosure (1), II MEF Command Diary, 1 October-15 December 1962.

²¹⁶ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 22.

the full might of General Sweeney and the 19th Air Force would be applied to neutralize the Cuban fighters in the drop zones.²¹⁷

The Cuban invasion force expected the pre-assault air operations to establish several conditions before the commencement of the amphibious and airborne assaults. Those conditions included: (1) complete air superiority; (2) destruction of Cuban surface-to-surface missile capabilities; (3) destruction of known armor capabilities; and (4) isolation of the objective area.²¹⁸ These objectives appeared achievable with each day's air operations calling for over 1,000 sorties.²¹⁹ With a better overall understanding of the preparation into and the conditions expected at the conclusion of the air campaign, a more in depth look at the details of OPLAN 316-62 is now warranted.

Large-scale military operational plans and orders can contain an enormous amount of information and, with 93 pages total and several restricted annexes still to be published, Admiral Dennison's OPLAN 316-62 provided ample details for his major subordinate commands to plan for, prepare, and execute their assigned tasks and missions. This detailed review of OPLAN 316-62 will begin with the task organization of those forces assigned and their command relationships.

²¹⁷ Pardoe, 84, quoted in "The Air Force Response to the Cuban Crisis," U.S. Air Force Historical Division Liaison Office, 8.

²¹⁸ *Command Diary of HQ FMFLANT and II MEF*, Message from CG FMFLANT to CINCLANT, 300200Z Oct 1962; Tab (MMM), Appendix 7 to Enclosure (1), II MEF Command Diary, 1 October-15 December 1962. Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, 1.

²¹⁹ Pardoe, 84, quoted in "The Air Force Response to the Cuban Crisis," 8.

Command Relationships

As previously mentioned, Admiral Dennison had originally envisioned a joint task force (JTF-122) with a single commander, leading the invasion force of Cuba, but eliminated that staff on 20 October and the CINCLANT headquarters and staff assumed those planning and command responsibilities.²²⁰ Accordingly, Admiral Dennison would now control the operations in and around Cuba through his subordinate headquarters of the Army, Navy and Air Force. Command relationships with those components fell within three distinct stages during the operation: initial operations up to H-hour of the assault (see figure 2); subsequent operations ashore, but prior to activation of JTF Cuba (see figure 5); and operations following the activation of JTF Cuba (see figure 6).²²¹

²²⁰ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 22.

²²¹ *Command Diary of HQ FMFLANT and II MEF*, Tab FFF, CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, C-I-1 to C-III-1. Hereafter referred to as CINCLANT OPLAN 316-62. Of note, Appendix 7 (Supporting Documents) to Enclosure (1) (HQ, FMFLANT/HQ) II MEF Command Diary, 1 October-15 December 1962 identifies Tab FFF as CINCLANT OPLAN 316-62 yet the actual document cover within Tab FFF identifies the plan as OPLAN 316-63. It would seem that after the standdown phase and return to peacetime operations; change 13 of OPLAN returned the reaction time to 18 days and updated the OPLAN to 316-63, as the update is dated Jan 1963.

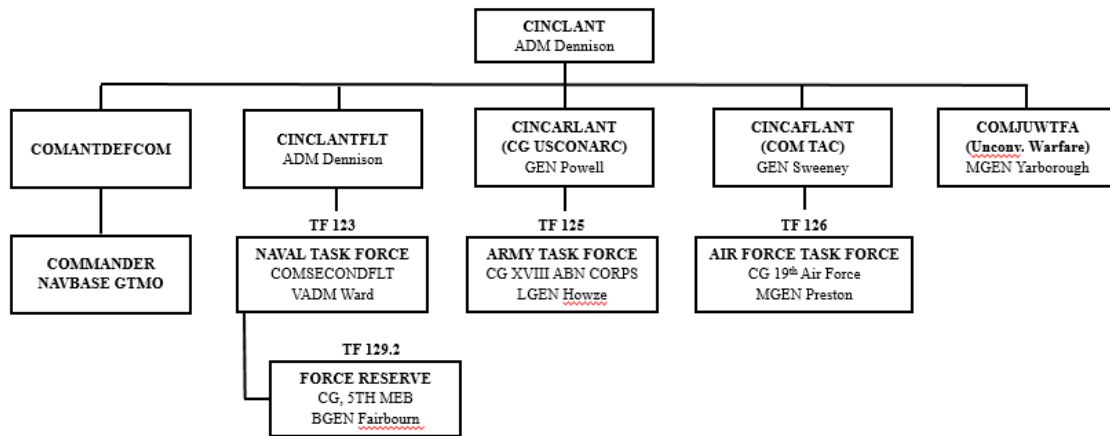


Figure 2. OPLAN 316-62 Command Relations for Initial Operations (Pre-assault)

Source: Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, *Command Diary of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic and II Marine Expeditionary Force*, 28 January 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, OPLAN 316-62, C-I-1; Atlantic Command, Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis* (Norfolk, VA: Atlantic Command, 1963), Enclosure (2) to Chapter (1), 1.

During this initial stage of the operation, each task force commander is provided an area of operation to command and control. Admiral Dennison identified the entire operating area as Joint Zone Cuba and divided it into two sub-sectors: the Western Sector and the Eastern Sector. Within these sectors, an airborne assault Area, Amphibious Assault Areas, Air Corridors, and common reference points were to facilitate commander responsibilities and effect coordination of the force (see figures 3 and 4).²²²

Responsibility for air operations in the Western Sector would fall to CINCAFLANT (CG, 19th Air Force), excluding the amphibious objective areas. Once JTF Cuba is established,

²²² CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, O-1. Although OPLAN 316-62 only contains one Amphibious Objective Area, the employment of the force reserve, the 5th MEB, in other areas could establish another Amphibious Objective Area.

all air control over Cuba would pass to the Commander, Air Force Task Force underneath Commander, JTF Cuba (CJTF Cuba).²²³

Responsibility for air operations in the Eastern Sector, as well as the Amphibious Objective Areas, would belong to Vice Admiral Ward as Commander, Naval Task Force and COMSECONDFLT. Air operations within the Amphibious Objective Areas would be further delegated to Vice Admiral Rivero as Commander, Amphibious Task Force. Meanwhile, control of ground operations in the Western sector, with the exception of the Amphibious Objective Area, would be assigned to Lieutenant General Hamilton H. Howze, Commanding General XVIII Airborne Corps and the Commander, Army Task Force. Because multiple task force commanders have been assigned areas in which to operate and the changeover of those areas to follow-on commanders is not explicit, Admiral Dennison directed CINCAFLANT and CINCNAVLAN to maintain direct liaison for air operations until CJTF Cuba was established.²²⁴

²²³ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, C-1.

²²⁴ Ibid.

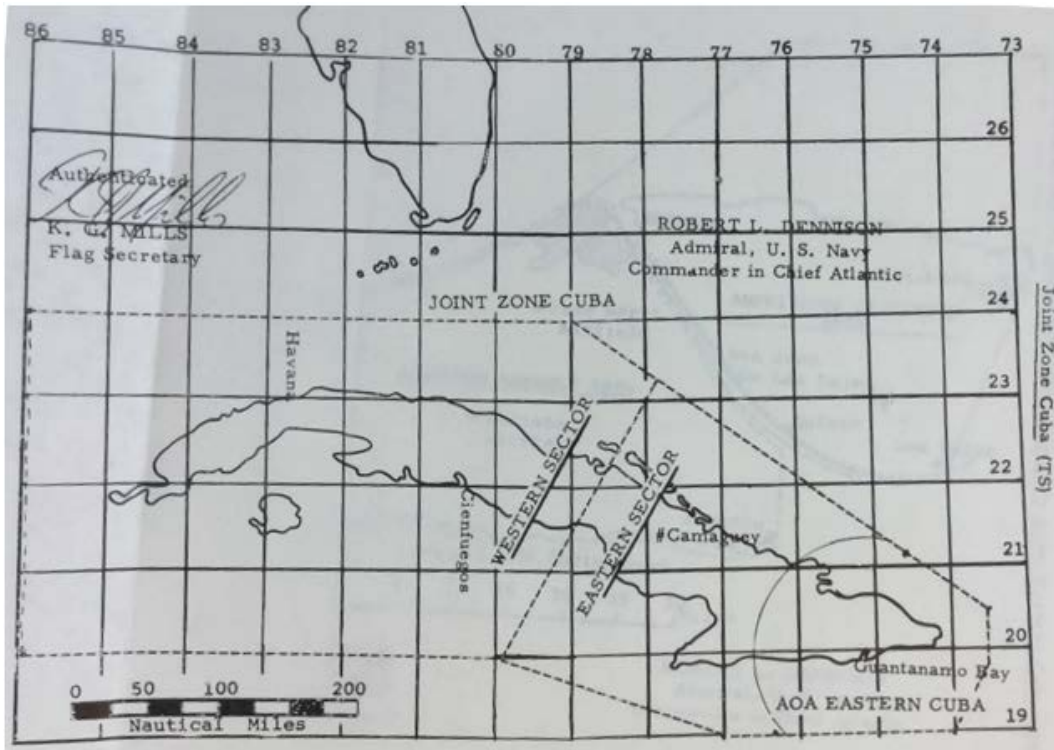


Figure 3. Joint Zone Cuba: OPLAN 316-62 Operating Areas

Source: Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, *Command Diary of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic and II Marine Expeditionary Force*, 28 January 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, OPLAN 316-62, O-I-1.

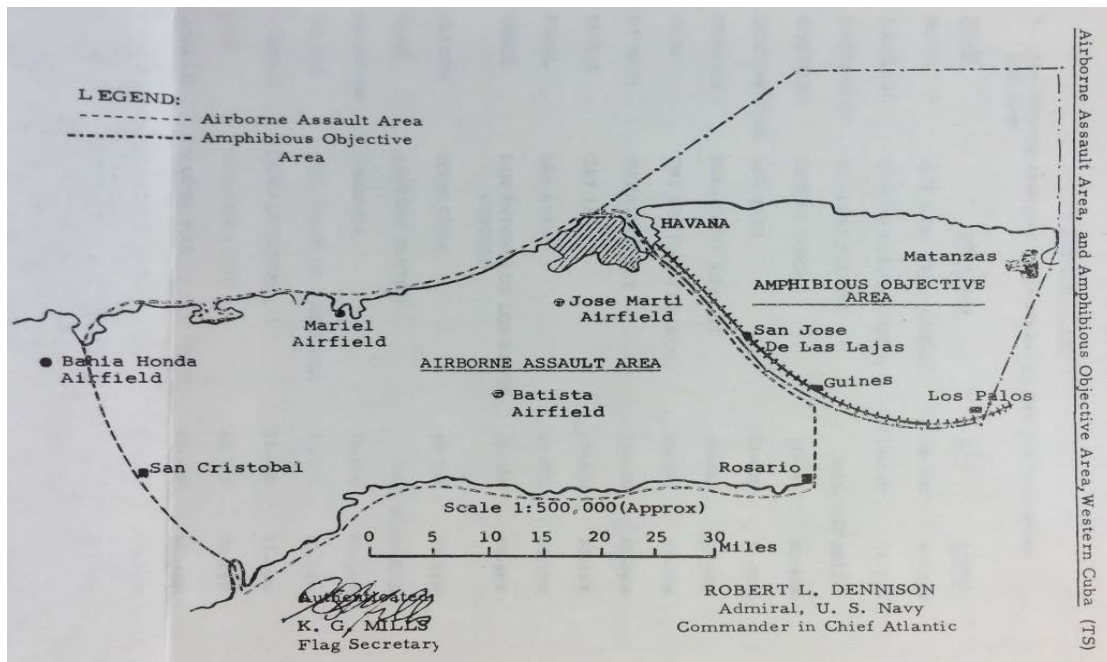


Figure 4. Airborne Assault Area and Amphibious Objective Area, Western Cuba

Source: Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, *Command Diary of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic and II Marine Expeditionary Force*, 28 January 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, OPLAN 316-62, O-II-1.

Once forces were ashore, command relations would change slightly once certain conditions were met and eventually the preponderance of the forces would fall under the operational control of the Commander Land Forces Western Cuba (CG, XVIII Airborne Corps). Admiral Dennison did not specify in OPLAN 316-62 what conditions would warrant the termination of airborne and amphibious operations.²²⁵ It seems reasonable to expect that the amphibious and airborne objective areas and their commanders would remain in effect until CJTF Cuba is established even with the intermediate command

²²⁵ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, C-3.

relations plan in place for operations ashore, but prior to CJTF Cuba being established. After all, the Commander, Land Forces Western Cuba (CG, XVIII Airborne Corps) is also in fact the CJTF Cuba.

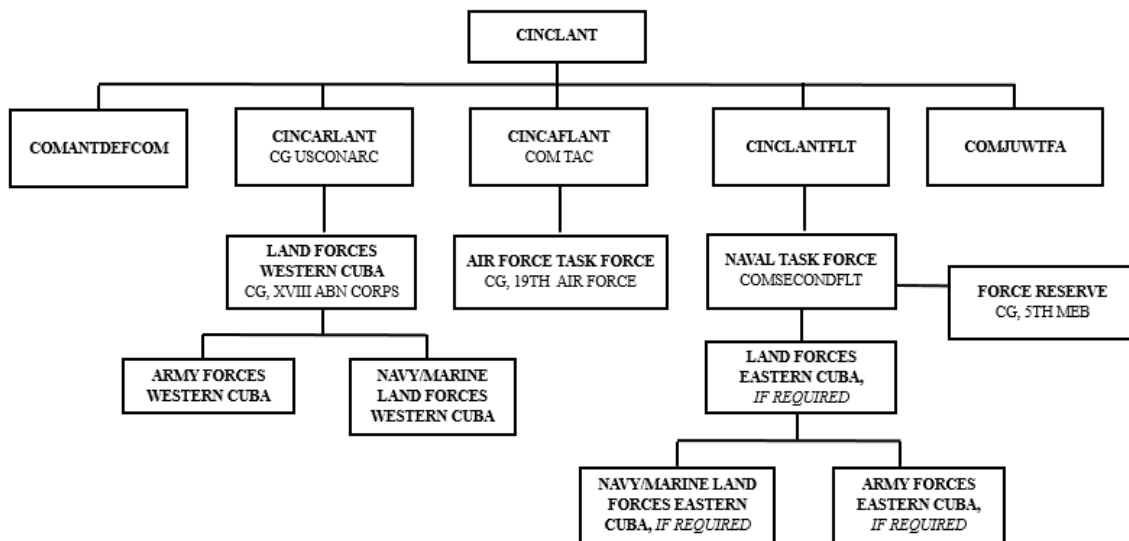


Figure 5. Command Relations for Operations Ashore
Prior to Establishment of JTF Cuba

Source: Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, *Command Diary of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic and II Marine Expeditionary Force*, 28 January 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, OPLAN 316-62, C-II-1.

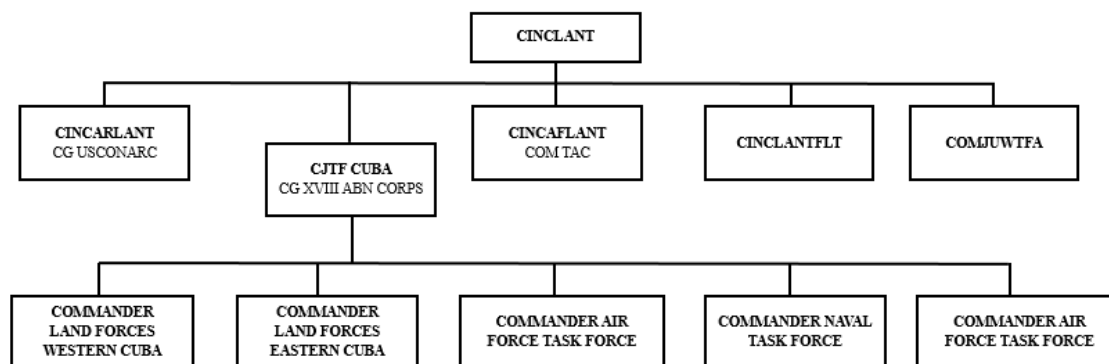


Figure 6. Command Relations Once JTF Cuba is Established

Source: Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, *Command Diary of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic and II Marine Expeditionary Force*, 28 January 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, OPLAN 316-62, C-III-1.

Once the transition to JTF Cuba occurs, the command relationship on the island is straightforward. All the component task forces would now report to the CJTF Cuba vice going through their respective service components to Admiral Dennison at CINCLANT.²²⁶ The notion of having a single task force commander, as the Commander, JTF-122 was prior to Admiral Dennison eliminating JTF-122 on 20 October, and then subsequent establish of a CJTF Cuba appears duplicitous. Admiral Dennison's decision to eliminate the use of a joint headquarters for the invasion has been both criticized and complimented by scholars.²²⁷ Norman Polmar and John D. Gresham in *DEFCON-2* explain the decision as a practical matter, as the crisis developed Admiral Dennison

²²⁶ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, C-III-1.

²²⁷ Polmar and Gresham, 221; House, 102.

simply did not have the time to form the task force headquarters and properly fill the staffing required for the execution of OPLAN 316-62.²²⁸ Jonathon House posits that Dennison's decision may have been more of a reflection of the Kennedy administration's desire to maintain close, centralized control over all aspects of the invasion plan.²²⁹

Regardless of the reason for doing so, the complexity of controlling the initial phases of the invasion that included multi-service air attacks, airborne drops and amphibious assaults from the Atlantic Command Headquarters in Norfolk, Virginia appeared risky. This command and control measure meant that each component would fight the invasion and initial days of the war separately. The Navy and Marines would control ground and air operations in the Amphibious Objective Areas, the Army would control ground operations in the rest of the Western Sector, as well as coordinate air operations in the airborne assault area, and the Air Force would conduct air operations in the Western Sector, exclusive of the airborne and amphibious areas. Although the airborne and amphibious areas were adjacent to one another, OPLAN 316-62 only spelled out a direct liaison requirement between the CINCAFLANT and the CINCARLANT. OPLAN 316-62 does not appear to address any required coordination between the Army and Navy/Marine Corps beyond the assertion that once amphibious operations were deemed complete, those Navy and Marine land forces would then fall under command of the XVIII Airborne Corps. Although the command relationships were compartmentalized by service, the objectives assigned were not. Generally, the large

²²⁸ Polmar and Gresham, 221.

²²⁹ House, 97.

objectives were more interdependent and mutually supporting. An examination of what Admiral Dennison was directing his service component task forces to do, as well what forces they had available, is now prudent.

Forces Available and Assigned Objectives

The allocation of forces for Cuban contingency operations had evolved significantly from the original two battle groups—just ten infantry companies—envisioned for operations in 1960 to what would be the largest invasion force assembled since the Battle of Okinawa in 1945.²³⁰ Ground combat forces fell within two task forces: TF 125, the Army combat force commanded by Lieutenant General Howze, CG, XVIII Airborne Corps, and TF 123, the Navy and Marine Corps combat force commanded by Vice Admiral Ward, COMSECONDFLT. TF 125 was organized into four separate echelons: air, surface, floating reserve, and on-call. On 27 October 1962, the forces allocated to these echelons were as follows:

Task Force 125 (CG, XVIII Airborne Corps)

Air Echelon:

Headquarters, XVIII Airborne Corps

82nd Airborne Division

101st Airborne Division

1st Infantry Division

Co. D (Light Tank), 66th Armor

²³⁰ Polmar and Gresham, 221.

1st Battalion, 92nd Field Artillery

2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery

Surface Echelon:

Brigade of the 2nd Infantry Division

(two battle groups reinforced with 2nd Battalion (Med Tank), 69th Armor)

Task Force CHARLIE, 1st Armored Division²³¹

(Brigade sized combat command with a medium tank battalion, an armored cavalry squadron, a mechanized infantry battalion, and an artillery battalion)

2nd Battalion, 11th Field Artillery

1st Battalion, 92nd Field Artillery

54th Artillery Group

Floating Reserve:

Headquarters, 1st Armored Division

Brigade of the 1st Armored Division

Two Battle Group Task Forces, 2nd Infantry Division

On-Call Echelon:

Brigade of the 1st Armored Division

8th Battalion (Med Tank), 34th Armor

3rd Battalion, 16th Field Artillery

Headquarters, 2nd Infantry Division and supporting forces

52nd Artillery Group²³²

²³¹ Kuglar, III-26.

²³² Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 65-66; CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, A-1.

The forces allocated to TF 123 were more distinct from TF 125, in that it included not only two separate landing forces, II MEF and 5th MEB, but also all assigned shipping to support the Marine and Army amphibious assaults (see figure 7).

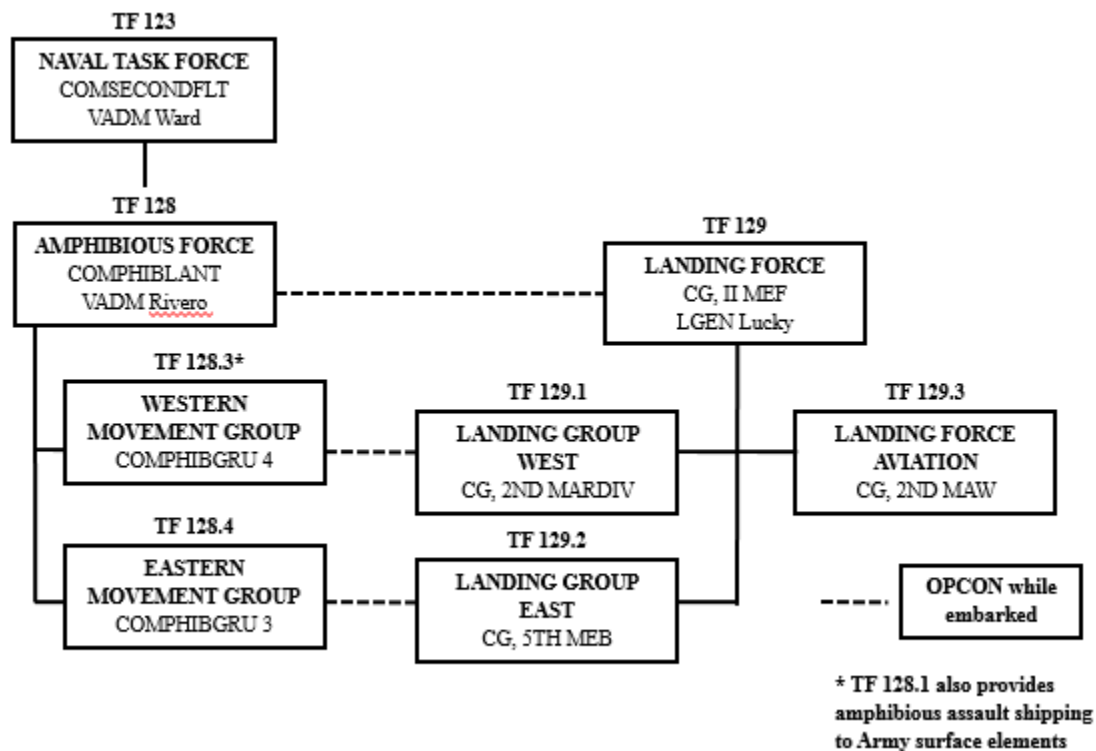


Figure 7. Major Subordinate Units of TF 123

Source: Atlantic Command, Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis* (Norfolk, VA: Atlantic Command, 1963), Enclosure (2) to Chapter 1, 1.

The breakdown of the major combat forces contained within TF 123 is as follows:

TF 129 (CG, II MEF)

2nd Marine Division (-)(Rein)

Regimental Landing Team-2 (RLT-2) (Three Battalion Landing Teams)

Regimental Landing Team-8 (RLT-8) (Three Battalion Landing Teams)

10th Marine Regiment (-)(Rein) (Two Field Artillery Battalions)

2nd Tank Battalion (-)

2nd Anti-Tank Battalion (-)

2nd Reconnaissance Battalion (-)

2nd Marine Air Wing (-)(Rein)²³³

To summarize, almost 88,000 Army and Marine personnel were scheduled to land on the island by D+5 and with additional reserves, the total strength of the available American landing force being approximately 125,000 personnel. By the end of D-Day, total forces on the island would reach 31,112 personnel within 70 rifle companies, 30 artillery batteries, and 10 tank companies and other combat support units. Follow on surface and air landings would bring the total major combat units available on the island up to 95 rifle companies, 55 artillery batteries and 16 tank companies.²³⁴ The total numbers of the invasion is broken down as follows:

TF 125 (Army Task Force): 99,200 troops (Soldiers and attached personnel)

Air Echelon (complete by D+3): 35,000 troops

Surface Echelon (complete by D+5): 36,900 troops

Floating Reserve (Landings D+7 to D+13): 7,900 troops

On-Call Reserve (U.S. based, no pre-planned landing): 19,400 troops²³⁵

²³³ *Command Diary of Headquarters FMFLANT and II MEF*, 1-3-B-1.

²³⁴ Kuglar, III-28 to III-29.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, III-26 to III-28.

TF 129 (II MEF Landing Force): 25,724 troops (Marines and attached personnel)

2nd Marine Division (complete by D+1): 15,208 troops

5th MEB (CINCLANT Reserve): 10,516 troops²³⁶

These two distinct forces, TF 125 and TF 129, also had distinct objectives on D-Day and the days that followed. TF 125 (Army forces) would primarily operate in the Airborne Assault Area, while TF 129 (Marine forces) would operate in the Amphibious Objective Area. Within the Airborne Assault Area, the 82nd Airborne Division, reinforced by a two battle group brigade task force from the 1st Infantry Division, would seize the airfields south of Havana at Jose Marti and San Antonio de los Banos, the latter formerly known as the Batista airfield. The 101st Airborne Division, reinforced by a single battle group task force from the 1st Infantry Division, would seize the northern coastal airfields at Mariel and Playa Baracoa, as well as the port of Mariel allowing TF Charlie and other support and sustainment units to debark by surface echelon.²³⁷ After seizing the airfields and ports, TF 125 would isolate the city of Havana and seize government and communication facilities (see figure 8).²³⁸

²³⁶ *Command Diary of Headquarters FMFLANT and II MEF*, 1-4-A-3.

²³⁷ Kuglar, III-25.

²³⁸ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, B-I-2.

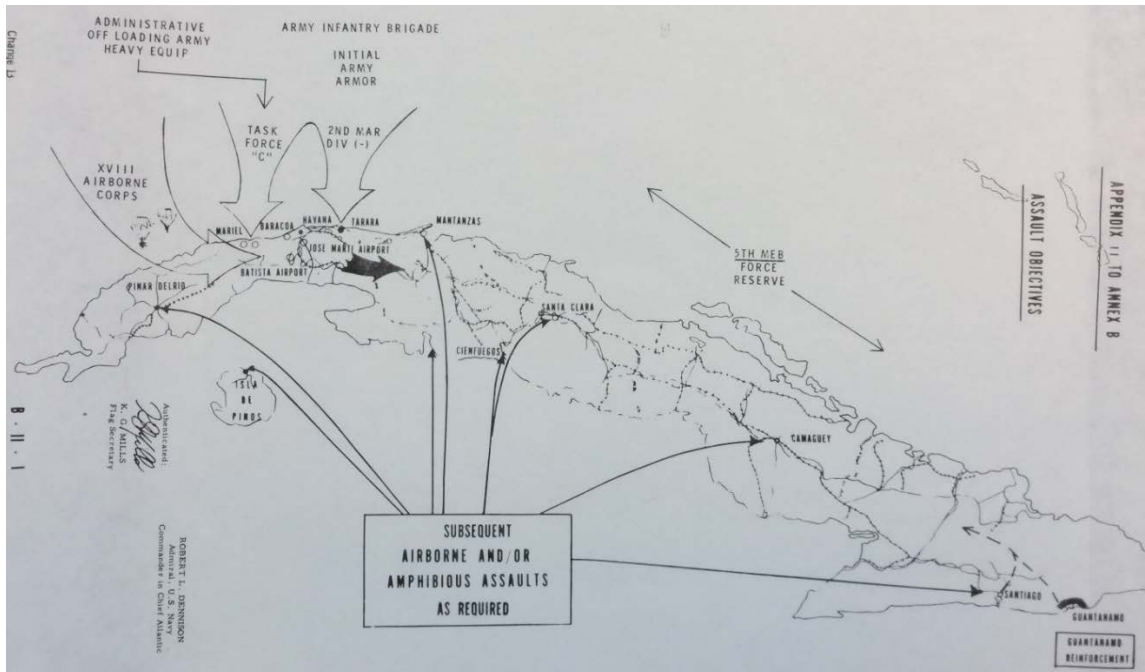


Figure 8. Operations Overlay and Major Objectives for CINCLANT OPLAN 316-63

Source: Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, *Command Diary of Headquarters, Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic and II Marine Expeditionary Force*, 28 January 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, OPLAN 316-62, B-II-1.

Simultaneous with the Army's airborne assault on Havana-Mariel area, the 2nd MARDIV would conduct an amphibious assault near Tarara to secure a beachhead, destroy armed resistance outside Havana, sever the enemy's lines of communications, secure Morro Castle and the Port of Regla (opposite Havana across the Canal de Entrada), and link-up with airborne forces when practical.²³⁹ The 2nd MARDIV would assault over a contiguous landing zone that was over 3,300 meters in width and broken

²³⁹ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, B-I-2.

into separate landing beaches, identified east to west as Blue Beach, Red Beach 1 and Red Beach 2.²⁴⁰

The 2nd MARDIV's two main ground combat forces would assault the beaches abreast. RLT-2 was assigned to land on Blue Beach and seize their assigned division objectives to the east of Tarara at Santa Maria Delmar, destroy enemy in the vicinity and protect the division's eastern flank.²⁴¹ RLT-8 was assigned to land on Red Beach 1 and Red Beach 2 and seize their assigned division objectives to the west, including the town of Tarara, the Port of Regla, and Morro Castle.²⁴² It is interesting to note that in the RLT__(BLUE BEACH) OPLAN 314-62, 2nd MARDIV's broader purpose in securing a beachhead and key objectives was to permit the rapid landing and initiation of operations ashore by the 2nd Infantry Division. However, in the RLT-8 OPLAN 316-62 this purpose, as well as the task of conducting a forward passage of lines for follow-on forces, is missing.²⁴³

STRAC OPLAN 316-62 clearly indicated that a two-battle group brigade from the 2nd Infantry Division, reinforced with a medium tank battalion and an artillery group

²⁴⁰ RLT-8, 2d Marine Division (-)(REIN), Operation Plan 316-62, 12 Nov 1962, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, C-2-A-1-1. Hereafter referred to as RLT-8 OPLAN 316-62.

²⁴¹ RLT_(BLUE BEACH), Operation Plan 314-62 – 2nd Marine Division, Records Group 127, Records of the U.S. Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, 2. Hereafter referred to as RLT_(BLUE BEACH) OPLAN 314-62.

²⁴² RLT-8 OPLAN 316-62, 3-4.

²⁴³ RLT_(BLUE BEACH) OPLAN 314-62, 1; RLT-8 OPLAN 316-62, 1-4.

with four firing battalions, would land over the beaches at Tarara.²⁴⁴ A likely scenario is that the 2nd MARDIV's RLTs were no longer tasked with coordinating the forward passage of lines for those forces and that 2nd MARDIV or II MEF might be taking on the task. Another possibility may be that the task was removed from the order in the interest of brevity, as the 2nd Infantry Division Brigade was not scheduled to land until D+1, and thus the task of who should coordinate the forward passage of lines could be based on the conditions on the ground. Still, with the significant amount of missions already contained in RLT-8's OPLAN 316-62 that were designated "be prepared to," the notion that one additional task would be excluded for brevity's sake seems unlikely. This lack of detail regarding the coordination of the 2nd Infantry Division Brigade's arrival at Tarara within the Marine Corps RLT-8 OPLAN seems indicative of a broader lack of coordination and synchronization between TF 125 and TF 129 forces as a whole.

Perhaps the lack of details regarding coordination with the Army in the Marine Corps' operation plans was a result of the incomplete details provided in Admiral Dennison's plan. It would appear so. In Admiral Dennison's OPLAN 316-62, there is no mention of forward passage of lines or facilitating the rapid introduction of follow-on forces in regards to the operations of TF 129. What is mentioned, however, in Annex B, Concept of Operations is that JTF Cuba (led by the CG, XVIII Airborne Corps, who is already commanding TF 123) would be activated only after the amphibious operation is completed and Army forces are established ashore.²⁴⁵ Meanwhile, in Annex C, Command

²⁴⁴ Kuglar, III-25.

²⁴⁵ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, B-I-3.

Relations, Admiral Dennison indicates that once airborne and amphibious operations are complete, if required, Commander TF 125 would control all western ground forces until Admiral Dennison activates JTF Cuba. Later in the annex, Admiral Dennison spells out that once amphibious and airborne assault operations are complete the CJTF Cuba would be activated, would report directly to Admiral Dennison, and be responsible for all subsequent operations ashore in Cuba.²⁴⁶ The complexity of the operation's command structure up to this envisioned point in the operation is astonishing and deserves further review.

As identified earlier, prior to the establishment of the JTF Cuba, the task force commanders reported through their respective service components up to Admiral Dennison. For instance, Lieutenant General Hamilton H. Howze, CG XVIII Airborne Corps and Commander, TF 125, would report to General Herbert B. Powell, the Commander Army Forces, Atlantic who then reported to Admiral Dennison, CINCLANT. Meanwhile, Major General Wieseman, CG, 2nd MARDIV and Commander TF 129.1 (Naval Task Force, Landing Group West) would report to Lieutenant General Robert B. Lucky, CG II MEF and Commander TF 129 (Naval Task Force, Landing Force), who then reported to Vice Admiral Horatio Rivero, Commander, Amphibious Task Force (TF 128), who reported to Vice Admiral Alfred Ward, Commander, Naval Task Force (TF 123), who finally reported to Admiral Dennison. Upon the establishment of JTF Cuba, General Lucky and II MEF would report to General Howze, as the CJTF

²⁴⁶ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, C-3.

Cuba, for operations ashore, but while embarked, would report to Admiral Rivero, as part of the Amphibious Task Force.

Clearly, these command relationships were not simple, nor unambiguous. To complicate matters further, the headquarters for all these units were extremely dispersed for what was supposed to be a well-coordinated joint force. Admiral Dennison's CINCLANT headquarters was in Norfolk, Virginia, whereas, General Powell's ARLANT headquarters was at Fort Monroe, Virginia and his forward headquarters was at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida.²⁴⁷ General Howze's XVIII Airborne Corps garrison headquarters was at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, but would be prepositioned forward to stage prior to conducting the airborne assault.

Meanwhile, General Lucky and the II MEF headquarters remained at Norfolk, Virginia, while Lucky's commander, Admiral Rivero, Commander, Amphibious Task Force, and Lucky's subordinate, General Wieseman, CG, 2nd MARDIV embarked their headquarters aboard amphibious shipping in preparation for the invasion of Cuba.²⁴⁸ The Air Force Task Force for Admiral Dennison kept its main headquarters at Langley Air Force Base, Virginia and sent an advanced command post to Homestead Air Force Base, Florida in order to better coordinate the execution of OPLAN 312-62 in advance of the invasion. Once the transition was made to executing OPLAN 316-62, the Air Force Task Force forward element at Homestead command post would return north to coordinate the

²⁴⁷ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, 8.

²⁴⁸ *Command Diary of Headquarters FMFLANT and II MEF*, 1-3-B-1.

air campaign from Langley.²⁴⁹ While the major commands on the East Coast were accelerating planning and positioning elements of their staffs forward, the 5th MEB headquarters and staff was aboard the USS *Eldorado* steaming towards the Panama Canal continuing to refine its possible employment in support of Admiral Dennison's OPLAN 316-62.

Options for Employment of the 5th MEB

When the 5th MEB headquarters was activated on 20 October, the JCS had also directed a change to focus solely on planning for the newly designated OPLAN 316-62. Accordingly, the only planned employment options for the 5th MEB at that point were as a reinforcement force for Guantanamo Bay. Admiral Dennison and his staff envisioned two methods of employment at the time. First, the 5th MEB could offload at Guantanamo Naval Base proper and reinforce the base defense, or second, the brigade could conduct an amphibious assault in the vicinity of Santiago de Cuba to seize the port, airfield, and government facilities to establish a base and support subsequent operations and a possible breakout by defense forces from Guantanamo Bay (see figure 8, lower right).²⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Admiral Dennison's force reserve contemplated under CINCLANT OPLAN

²⁴⁹ CINCLANT, OPLAN 316-62, 8.

²⁵⁰ 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, OPLAN 314-61 – Landing Group EAST (TG 129.2), 26 Feb 1962, Records Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, 2. Hereafter referred to as 5th MEB OPLAN 314-61. See also, *Diary of Headquarters FMFLANT and II MEF*, Tab EEE, CINCLANT, OPLAN 314-61, B-2 to B-4. Hereafter referred to as CINCLANT OPLAN 314-61.

314-61 was a yet to be identified reinforced Marine BLT from II MEF.²⁵¹ Designating the 5th MEB as the CINCLANT force reserve would occur later under Admiral Dennison's OPLAN 316-62. As the brigade set sail and steamed toward the Panama Canal, its focus was on reinforcing Guantanamo Bay and preparing for a possible assault against Santiago de Cuba.

Santiago de Cuba is the second largest city in Cuba behind Havana. The town is situated on the southern coast of Cuba, about 40 miles west of Guantanamo Naval Base and provides access from the sea to the major ground lines of communication in southeastern Cuba. Santiago de Cuba was also a key location for the Cuban Army, as the Headquarters, Eastern Army and Combat Forces Sierra Maestra, commanded by Major Raul Castro, was also located there.²⁵² General Fairbourn's concept of operation would split the brigade into two forces that would land east and west of the city, secure the beachheads and move north by mechanized means to link-up with aviation forces that were blocking north of the city.²⁵³ If the brigade was employed at Guantanamo Naval Base, it could conduct an assault to seize key terrain along the Yateras River, land at Guantanamo, or some combination between the two.²⁵⁴ The emphasis, refinement and

²⁵¹ CINCLANT OPLAN 314-61, A-3.

²⁵² Commanding General, 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, *Command Diary of the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, 5 to 30 November 1962, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific*, 16 December 1962, Marine Corps History Division – Archives Branch, Marine Corps Base-Quantico, VA, Tab J: Joint Intelligence Estimate (CUBA), 3. Hereafter referred to as *Command Diary of 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 62*.

²⁵³ 5th MEB OPLAN 314-61, 3.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, I-2.

preparation for the assault against Santiago de Cuba and Guantanamo Naval Base would be short-lived, however, as the 20 October directive from the JCS to focus on planning and preparing solely for OPLAN 316-62 would add several more possible objectives for the brigade.

Of note, however, the 5th MEB Command Diary indicates that this directive was not received by the brigade staff until 8 November, a delay of 19 days!²⁵⁵ The narrative in the command diary was succinct and unambiguous:

Instructions were now received directing that all planning and preparations for CINCLANT OPLAN 314-61 be suspended with the exception of those portions of the plan which were applicable to OPLAN 316-62. No further reference to OPLAN 314-61 was to be made and applicable annexes were to be referred to as annexes of OPLAN 316-62 since they were equally applicable to both plans.²⁵⁶

With the above directive now in hand and along with the guidance General Fairbourn received at the Norfolk planning conference 6 November, the staff immediately commenced planning for the additional operations contemplated. Two key locations for possible operations were in the Mariel and Matanzas areas.²⁵⁷

Under CINCLANT OPLAN 316-62, the 101st Airborne Division would conduct an airborne assault in the Mariel-Baracoa area, seize the port and establish a beachhead to support the landing of TF Charlie later on D-Day.²⁵⁸ TF Charlie was a tailored brigade-sized armored force that was one of the keys to the success of the invasion. If TF Charlie

²⁵⁵ *Command Diary of 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 62, 3.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Kuglar, III-26.

was still at sea, this meant that the 101st Airborne had likely met increased resistance and not achieved their objective of seizing the port of Mariel. Without the armor and increased firepower of TF Charlie, the light infantry battle groups of the 101st were at risk to possible counterattacks from Cuban forces in the area and the entire invasion could now be in peril. In order to mitigate this risk, the first additional contingency plan for the 5th MEB was the reinforcement of the 101st Airborne Division in the Mariel Bay area. The planned mission statement was straightforward, “Landing Group EAST (TG 129.2) [5th MEB] as JTF Reserve lands, when directed, west of BAHIA DEL MARIEL establishes a beachhead to reinforce elements of the 101st Airborne Division remaining in the area; seizes and secures the port facilities at MARIEL; and prepares for further operations as directed.”²⁵⁹

The second addition to 5th MEB’s contingency plans was for possible employment in the Matanzas area. Matanzas was a beach town on the northern coast of Cuba just over 40 miles east of Tarara, the planned landing location of the 2nd MARDIV and the 2nd Infantry Division. While 316-2-62 was focused on supporting the Mariel beachhead establishment by action directly at that location, 316-3-62 was an operation that supported the Tarara beachhead, as well as the operations around Havana, but through an indirect method. Accordingly, the employment of the 5th MEB at Matanzas provided Admiral Dennison with the following options:

- a. Seizure of a limited beachhead to facilitate landing other forces, or from which to continue the attack and control the city of Matanzas and its port facilities;

²⁵⁹ 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, OPLAN 316-2-62 – Landing Group EAST (TG 129.2), 1 Dec 1962, Records Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, 2.

- b. Rapid exploitation of enemy forces should they collapse as a result of operations by other friendly forces in the Havana area; or
- c. A diversionary action to apply pressure to the enemy's rear or flank in support of the landings in the Havana area.²⁶⁰

Indeed, OPLAN 316-3-62 epitomizes the capabilities and options that an embarked and robust amphibious force can provide to a combatant commander. In this case, the flexibility this branch plan provided Admiral Dennison was remarkable. By landing the 5th MEB at Matanzas, Admiral Dennison could exploit success around Havana, even if limited. He could also employ the brigade to provide a third landing site for the introduction of follow surface forces, should one or both of the landings at Mariel and Tarara become untenable or undesirable. Lastly, as a diversionary attack, or feint, the supposed introduction of the brigade on the island in Matanzas would pose quite a dilemma for the Cuban military and would most certainly achieve the desired results for Admiral Dennison of relieving pressure on friendly forces around Havana.

As the brigade staff continued detailed planning on these two new contingency plans, on the 187 birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps, 10 November, General Lucky was informed that the 5th MEB was now assigned as the CINCLANT force reserve and would not be committed without the approval of Admiral Dennison.²⁶¹ The previously force reserve, a single BLT, now became the II MEF reserve and was identified as BLT 1/6.²⁶² A few days later on 13 November, the brigade staff briefed General Fairbourn and

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 1.

²⁶¹ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 62*, 5.

²⁶² RLT-8 OPLAN 316-62, 2.

the brigade chief of staff on the status of the contingency plans for the Matanzas and Mariel areas. With a few minor changes, General Fairbourn accepted the proposed concepts at that time. Copies of the draft plan were immediately made and distributed to subordinate units for comments and opinions for possible incorporation in the final plans.²⁶³

By mid-November, the 5th MEB now had detailed contingency plans ready for four distinct operations in support of the possible invasion of Cuba. Those plans were organized as supporting plans of the 5th MEB OPLAN 316-62 and were identified as follows:

- a. 5th MEB OPLAN 316-1-62: Reinforcement of Guantanamo Naval Base.
- b. 5th MEB OPLAN 316-2-62: Reinforcement of Mariel and 101st Airborne Division.
- c. 5th MEB OPLAN 316-3-62: Operations in the Matanzas area.
- d. 5th MEB OPLAN 316-4-62: Operations in the Santiago/Yateras River areas.²⁶⁴

316-2-62 and 316-3-62 were the new contingency plans, while 316-1-62 and 316-4-62 stemmed from the contemplated operations envisioned in OPLAN 314-61. Meanwhile, with Khrushchev having agreed to remove the Soviet Medium and Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles from Cuba on 28 October the crisis was still far from over. To begin with, the Soviets had to actually begin dismantling the missiles and showing clear, observable indications that they were in the process of removing them. Additionally,

²⁶³ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 62, 6.*

²⁶⁴ 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, OPLAN Plan 316-62 – 19 Jan 1963, Records Group 127, Records of the United States Marine Corps, National Archives, College Park, MD, 1.

much negotiating remained to be completed between the diplomatic agents of the United States and the Soviet Union to address other forms of weapons, equipment, and Soviet personnel on the island.

As the brigade staff was continuing to refine its contingency plans for the invasion with urgency the first few weeks of November, it became apparent to General Lucky and Admiral Rivero that the current period afloat on a prolonged alert at maximum readiness could extend until close to Christmas. In order to maintain the high state of readiness currently achieved, the 5th MEB and II MEF landing forces were scheduled to conduct exercises ashore at various locations in the Caribbean for training, physical conditioning of troops, and maintenance of equipment.²⁶⁵ On 10 November, General Fairbourn split the 5th MEB into two increments. One increment would remain on a 24-hour reaction time to augment and reinforce Guantanamo Naval Base and the other increment would conduct training on Vieques Island with the requirement to be able to re-embark to shipping within a 36-hour timeframe. The increments would rotate at 10-day intervals.²⁶⁶

While Brigadier General Fairbourn and the 5th MEB conducted training on Vieques Island, Major General Weiseman's 2nd MARDIV and Rear Admiral G.F. Pittard's PHIBGRU-4 conducted the largest amphibious exercise since World War II. At 0700, 16 November 1962, two RLTs and six BLTs landed in the assault over Onslow Beach, North Carolina. Four BLTs assaulted by surface and two assaulted by helicopter.

²⁶⁵ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 158.

²⁶⁶ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 62*, 6; *Command Diary of Headquarters FMFLANT and II MEF*, 1-3-A-8.

All waves landed within one minute of schedule and there were no craft broached during the exercise.²⁶⁷

The landing at Onslow Beach marked the high-water mark in the readiness and posture of the Navy and Marine Corps amphibious force's participation in the Cuban Missile Crisis. Shortly thereafter, Admiral Dennison began to relax the readiness posture of the invasion force. For the Marines of the 2nd MARDIV, some units would remain ashore to conduct additional training, while others back-loaded onto amphibious shipping for return to either Norfolk or the holding area.²⁶⁸ Even all five increments of TF Charlie, involving some 2,500 Army personnel, conducted a large-scale amphibious training exercise at Port Everglades, Florida during this period.²⁶⁹

On 21 November, the Cuban quarantine that President Kennedy had announce on 22 October was finally lifted, Defense Readiness Condition Two (one level short of imminent nuclear war) was cancelled, and the pace to return to a peacetime posture for defense forces increased significantly. By 28 November, the Atlantic Fleet, with few exceptions, had returned to Defense Readiness Condition Five (normal peacetime posture) and Admiral Dennison ordered most units and ships to return to their home stations.²⁷⁰ The next day, the 5th MEB and PHIBGRU-3 received orders to sailing orders. Vice Admiral Rivero directed the force to proceed to Guantanamo Naval Base, embark

²⁶⁷ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 151.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 147.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 152.

BLT 2/1 (the battalion airlifted from the West Coast early in the crisis), and when loaded, sail to Panama and chop to the Commander, Pacific Fleet when clear of the Canal.²⁷¹

After just over a month at sea, the 5th MEB was returning home to San Diego, California.

The following day, Vice Admiral Horatio Rivero, Jr., Commander, Amphibious Forces

Atlantic transmitted a congratulatory message to PHIBRU-3 and the 5th MEB regarding

their participation in the Cuban operation. It read as follows:

1. Your presence in the Atlantic Fleet Amphibious Force during the past few weeks has given added substance to the mottos of our respective forces. With your ships, Sailors and Marines alongside we were a mighty vanguard for peace, a force united to land should the exigency have arisen.

2. The expeditious manner in which your forces responded to all their assigned tasks reflects their readiness and your ingenuity, foresight and leadership. Your participation in the current operations made a significant contribution to our nation's defense posture. Please pass to all the Navy and Marine Corps personnel who were involved in this operation my appreciation for a job well done.

3. I wish you God speed and smooth sailing. VADM H. RIVERO.

301815Z/NOV62.²⁷²

²⁷¹ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 1962*, 11.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, Tab FF, 1.

CHAPTER 5

AFTERMATH: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND SIGNIFICANCE

On Planning and Execution Shortfalls

On 10 December 1962 at 0740 local, the USS *Noble*, with BLT 1/7 aboard, arrived at the Del Mar Boat Basin on Camp Pendleton, the first ship of PHIBGRU-3 and the 5th MEB to arrive at port back in California.²⁷³ Over the next several days thereafter, the remaining 19 ships assigned to PHIBGRU-3 continued to arrive at the Del Mar Boat Basin, the San Diego Naval Base, and the Naval Air Station, North Island to disembark 5th MEB units. The last ship to complete offloading was the USS *Union* at 1230 local on 16 December.²⁷⁴ As the crisis and tensions with the Soviet Union returning to a peacetime norm, the brigade's reaction time for the Cuban contingency plans was now set at 18 days. This represented an allocation of four days for activation and loading, and 14 days for transit.²⁷⁵ At 0800 on 17 December, the brigade was officially deactivated.²⁷⁶ The 5th MEB had been at sea for just under two months and now took some much deserved extended liberty ashore.

²⁷³ Commanding General, 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, *Command Diary of the 5th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, 1 to 17 December 1962, Fleet Marine Force, Pacific*, 27 December 1962, Marine Corps History Division – Archives Branch. Marine Corps Base-Quantico, VA, 5. Hereafter referred to as *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 1-17 Dec 62*.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 6.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 4.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 7.

Separate from the brigade, the 5th MEB headquarters staff remained activated for the purpose of completing all required reports, documentation, and updating its Cuban Contingency Plans.²⁷⁷ Meanwhile, numerous “pats on the back” and congratulatory messages regarding a job well done would flow from all echelons of command and authority. According to Lieutenant General Robert Lucky’s II MEF operations officer, “The flexibility with which the Fleet Marine Force was quickly and quietly assembled was paramount. Without exception, anticipated reaction times were bettered. The posture attained represented a capability to execute combat operations as required. For this, the force was prepared.”²⁷⁸ This type of bravado in self-assessment may serve well in a report to Congress or the public, but to be included in a Top Secret report within the military it was woefully inaccurate. In the end, the force was indeed ready to conduct combat operations ashore in Cuba, but to assert that, all reaction times were not just met, but bettered, without any exceptions, borders on falsehood.

A more appropriate representation may be the following, In spite of numerous problems with embarkation, loading plans, ammunition shortages, communication problems with MATS and internal accountability shortfalls, the Fleet Marine Force was ultimately prepared, postured, and ready for combat when called. While not a complete list, the following are a summary of the few examples of the force coming up short on its advertised readiness, as presented in chapters 3 and 4.

²⁷⁷ *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 1-17 Dec 62, 7.*

²⁷⁸ *Command Diary of HQ FMFLANT and II MEF, 1-3-A-11.*

1. Mount out of BLT 2/1: As the West Coast ready battalion, BLT 2/1 was expected to be airborne within 24 hours of notification, or at a minimum, at the airfield ready to depart. Late in the evening on 18 October, the CG, 1st MARDIV was notified to transfer the Ready BLT to Guantanamo Naval Base as soon as possible.²⁷⁹ Even with the delays providing lift data to MATS known, Admiral Dennison informed the JCS that he expected the lift of BLT 2/1 to Guantanamo to complete by 21 October.²⁸⁰ In fact, the last aircraft did not depart El Toro until 1507 local on 22 October, nearly four days after the directive to launch the BLT was made.²⁸¹

2. 5th MEB 96 hour reaction: The 5th MEB's readiness shortfalls, though significant, were not as appalling as the departure of BLT 2/1. The brigade technically set sail with the entirety of its personnel within its directed 96-hour reaction time, yet it left behind a significant amount of ammunition, equipment, and over one hundred tons of supplies that would be loaded in follow-on shipping or flown to the Panama Canal for loading during transit, both of which require additional time to complete. This begs the question of what the definition of "complete" is. More or less complete is not the same as 100 percent complete.

3. 5th MEB loading problems: The actual loading of equipment on 5th MEB shipping in accordance with the planned landing schedules was botched as well. The

²⁷⁹ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 92.

²⁸⁰ J-3, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Master Checklist For Cuban Operations, 29 October 1962," Records Group 330, Records of the Cuban Missile Crisis, National Archives, College Park, MD, 12.

²⁸¹ *Report of Mount-out BLT 2/1 and 5th MEB*, 5.

problem was identified shortly after departure from California as the brigade sailed south toward the Panama Canal. The 5th MEB Command Diary indicates that while in transit through the Canal, as feasible, equipment and supplies were restaged on shipping to support the planned assault in Cuba and if equipment could not be moved, the landing plans would be modified, as required, to reflect this. One would then expect that once the brigade cleared the Panama Canal, its embarked equipment would be properly staged and its landing plans would be finalized for the potential combat assault in Cuba. This was not so. After passing through the Canal, the Brigade Embarkation Section conducted a detailed analysis of all ship loading plans and determined that the required number of transfers between ships to correct the Brigade Landing Plan was “excessive.”²⁸² Over the next five days, the Brigade Embarkation Section would complete an unknown and undocumented number of transfers between ships to correct this deficiency, with all work completed on 11 November. It is worth noting that if the president had approved the invasion and begun air strikes on 29 October, the initial amphibious and airborne assaults by XVIII Airborne Corps and II MEF could have been expected as early as seven days later on 5 November. The 5th MEB, as the force reserve, would have to have been ready for immediate employment once it cleared the Canal Zone on 7 November.

4. Command relationship concerns: As highlighted in chapter 4, the most significant challenges to the operation relating to command relationships would occur between the initiation of the assault and the establishment of JTF Cuba. The Navy and Marines would control ground and air operations in the Amphibious Objective Area,

²⁸² *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 1962, 2.*

while the Army and Air Force would control the bordering Airborne Assault Area and greater Western Sector. Meanwhile, if the 5th MEB was employed in the vicinity of Mariel, as envisioned in 5th MEB OPLAN 316-2-62, the only coordinating measure contained in the order was the establishment of coordination line around the Mariel area and reference to Annex L of OPLAN 316-62.²⁸³

Annex L indicated no command or coordination authority of the 5th MEB, even if committed in the Western Sector, with the Army Task Force (TF 125). In all portions of Annex L to OPLAN 316-62, the 5th MEB is shown to have a command relationship with Vice Admiral Horatio Rivero, Commander, Amphibious Force Atlantic (TF 128) and a coordination relationship with General Lucky, CG II MEF (TF 129) and Major General Frederick Weiseman, CG 2nd MARDIV (TF 129.1).²⁸⁴

General Herbert Powell, Commander Army Forces, Atlantic, was also hindered by his own ill-defined command relationship with the Third Army and the Peninsula Base Command regarding movement, staging, and logistical support jurisdictions and authorities. Neither of these commands were included or even envisioned in the Cuban Contingency Plans, yet General Powell was forced to tackle the complex coordination needed between these commands to coordinate, control, and deploy his invasion force.²⁸⁵ The shortcomings in Admiral Dennison's command relationships within the force were

²⁸³ 5th MEB, OPLAN 316-2-62, 3.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., L-2-1.

²⁸⁵ Kugler, IV-27.

still not resolved at the height of the crisis and luckily, for those units involved, the problem did not have to be solved in the midst of bloody battle.²⁸⁶

5. Amphibious shipping problems for the larger surface echelon (Army): One of the most urgent problems for General Powell as the possible invasion approached was a lack of sufficient amphibious assault shipping for his surface echelons (TF Charlie's assault at Mariel and the 2nd Infantry Division offload at Tarara, as well as all the supporting equipment).²⁸⁷ Admiral Rivero, as Commander, Amphibious Force Atlantic, was tasked to provide the amphibious lift for those assault forces. Admiral Rivero allocated four Landing Ships, Tank (LSTs) to support TF Charlie and planned to utilize the Western Movement Group (Amphibious Group Four) to support the 2nd Infantry Division, once those ships disembarked the Marine landing force.²⁸⁸ The problem XVIII Airborne Corps planners encountered was that it had assumed TF Charlie would be loaded in modern LSTs having a dead weight tonnage capacity of nearly 1,000 tons per vessel. Meanwhile, the older LSTs actually allocated by the Navy were of World War II vintage having a deeper draft and thus, a maximum dead weight tonnage capacity of just 600 tons in order to still be able to properly beach for offload.²⁸⁹ The first increment of TF Charlie called for the transport of approximately 3,900 tons of equipment.²⁹⁰ Clearly,

²⁸⁶ For additional discussion and analysis on Admiral Dennison's command structure problems during the Cuban Crisis, see House, 100-102; Kugler, Chapter IV.

²⁸⁷ Kugler, VI-22.

²⁸⁸ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 144.

²⁸⁹ Kugler, VI-23.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, VI-24.

the four LSTs Admiral Rivero assigned would not support the planned lift needs for the Army's amphibious assault.

Planners looked at a couple options to address this shortfall. First, they could reduce the load of TF Charlie's increments. Second, additional LSTs or amphibious shipping could be provided by the Navy. This option, however, would take significant time to accomplish and at the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis in late October, this option was not realistic. A third option, and the option that would have been utilized in the event of the invasion, was to load the four LSTs to ships well above its maximum beaching capacity and load a causeway pier on one of the ships to be used for offload.²⁹¹ The use of a causeway to offload equipment, as opposed to just driving off the boat ramp onto the beach as LSTs are designed to do, is a time-consuming affair (only one LST would be able to offload at a time). Further, to do so in the potentially hostile combat environment expected at Mariel, and for all increments of TF Charlie, would have been a recipe for disaster. Again, fortunately for the Army and Navy planners, the Cuban crisis receded before this partial solution was executed.

During the prolonged alert period in November 1962, planners from the Army and Navy continued to meet in an attempt to solve the amphibious shipping shortfalls that existed for lifting the Army's surface echelons. Several additional options were considered including the activation of Reserve Fleet LSTs, chartering commercial LSTs (not very realistic for a combat amphibious assault), or the use of additional Landing

²⁹¹ Kugler, VI-24.

Crafts, Utility after the offload of the Marine landing force.²⁹² At the conclusion of the crisis, however, the core problem regarding the Army's lift requirements exceeding the Navy's capability was still not adequately resolved.²⁹³

In spite of all these problems, the invasion force accomplished its assigned tasks and mission, ultimately supporting the achievement of the broader U.S. objective to remove the Soviet offensive weapons from Cuba. The significance here is that although the United States did not actually invade Cuba, it did have to demonstrate to Khrushchev, the Soviets, and the Cubans that the U.S. military possessed both the capability and will to do so. Moreover, according to communication from Soviet agents in the U.S., within the Kremlin, and even Khrushchev himself, all appeared to be most concerned with the possibility of an imminent U.S. incursion in Cuba.

In Premier Khrushchev's 26 October letter to President Kennedy, Khrushchev indicated that, "If assurances were given by the President and the Government of the United States that the USA itself would not participate in an attack on Cuba . . . this would immediately change everything . . . if there is no threat, then armaments are a

²⁹² As described, the "modern" LSTs Army planners referenced had a dead weight cargo capacity of up to 1,000 tons. LSTs were designed to transport heavy loads from the port of embarkation directly to the beach for debarkation. Meanwhile, LCUs were of similar design to LSTs but much smaller and designed to ferry troops and equipment from the large amphibious ships off shore to the beach for debarkation. LCUs of the day had a dead weight cargo capacity of up to 180 tons. LCUs could, however, go from Port to Beach in the same manner that LSTs could.

²⁹³ Atlantic Command, *CINCLANT Historical Account of the Cuban Crisis*, 144.

burden for every people.”²⁹⁴ Later within the same letter, Khrushchev would state, “I propose: we, for our part, will declare that our ships, bound for Cuba, will not carry any kind of armaments. You would declare that the United States will not invade Cuba with its forces. . . . Then the necessity for the presence of our military specialists in Cuba would disappear.”²⁹⁵

The next day, 27 October 1962, the KGB Station Chief in Washington sent a report to Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs, Comrade Andrei Gromyko, which indicated a source stating, “That in the next 48 hours there will be a troop landing in Cuba, following the bombardment of missile bases.”²⁹⁶ The following day, Premier Khrushchev would accept President Kennedy’s offer to remove the Soviet Union’s offensive weapons in Cuba in exchange for the public announced American pledge not to invade Cuba, and the secret pledge to withdraw the U.S. Jupiter nuclear missiles from Turkey and Italy within five months.²⁹⁷ The imminent threat of invasion forced both Khrushchev and Kennedy to negotiate quickly and reach a peaceful agreement to settle the crisis. This credible threat of force lies at the heart of successful military deterrence.

²⁹⁴ Office of the Historian, U.S. Department of State, “65. Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, 26 October 1962,” accessed 1 April 2016, <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v06/d65>.

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Wilson Center Digital Archive, “Soviet Intelligence Report on Meeting with Scali and American Proposal,” 27 October 1962, Wilson Center, accessed 16 October 2015, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114528>.

²⁹⁷ Garthoff, “Soviet Actions and Reactions in the Cuban Missile Crisis.”

On Deterrence Theory

The importance of the actions the Navy and Marine Corps took in regard to the Cuban threat provides a good context into understanding the nature of non-nuclear deterrence.²⁹⁸ Deterrence involves convincing an adversary that a contemplated action, in this case the Soviet positioning of ballistic missiles in Cuba, will not achieve the desired objective by providing a credible counteraction that would be deemed unacceptable to an adversary.²⁹⁹ Here again, President Kennedy made it clear to Premier Khrushchev throughout the crisis that Soviet ballistic missiles would not be permitted in Cuba and that all required actions would be taken to remove them. It was this fear of Kennedy's counteraction, an invasion of Cuba that ultimately influenced him to discontinue taking threatening action and remove the missiles.

Having a non-nuclear deterrence capability requires the United States to be able to project combat power abroad and provide a conventional, credible threat to an adversary to prevent them from taking threatening action, or to withdraw or refrain from aggressive action or threatening posture. Power projection, or force projection, is “the ability to project the military instrument of national power from the United States or another

²⁹⁸ Nuclear deterrence primarily falls within the commonly known theory of Mutually Assured Destruction. The counteraction of launching a nuclear strike would be a massive retaliatory strike, the consequences of which would be unacceptable to any adversary that might consider employing nuclear weapons.

²⁹⁹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1, *Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 25 March 2013), I-11.

theater, in response to requirements for military operations.”³⁰⁰ In a crisis, the nation often looks to the Navy and Marine Corps to respond swiftly and project combat power to deter adversaries; destroy enemy forces; and support joint force operations.

On Rapid Force Projection: Korea, Cuba, and Today

TF 128 had assembled the largest amphibious force the world had seen over the last two decades with 86 ships, 58 of which were amphibious, and over 40,000 personnel embarked.³⁰¹ In 1962, the U.S. Navy had a remarkable 130 total amphibious ships, reflecting 14.4 percent of the 900 active ships in the fleet. Whereas today, the U.S. Navy’s active fleet total is down to 271 ships, of which just 30 are amphibious, comprising 11 percent of the total fleet. Though, and on a ship-by-ship basis they are of comparable capacity.³⁰² Clearly, today’s Navy-Marine Corps amphibious team does not have the total lift capability to put to sea an amphibious force anywhere near the size of the force employed during the Cuban missile crisis.

As opposed to comparing and contrasting today’s capability with what the Navy and Marine Corps provided in 1962, it might be more worthwhile to compare the mobilization and deployment of amphibious forces of 1962 with what occurred at the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, when a similar type of immediate deployment in

³⁰⁰ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 8 November 2010, as amended through 15 October 2013), 105.

³⁰¹ Barlow.

³⁰² Naval History and Heritage Command, “US Ship Force Levels: 1886-present,” 13 January 2016, accessed 1 April 2016, <http://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/us-ship-force-levels.html>.

response to a crisis occurred. In mid-1950, the U.S. Navy had 634 active ships in its fleet, 79 of which were amphibious.³⁰³ However, the problem for the Navy-Marine Corps team at that time was not shipping, but manpower. On 30 June 1952, the Marine Corps had an active duty strength of 74,279 Marines, approximately three percent below the Marine Corps' authorized strength of 76,921 personnel. Of that total active duty strength in service, the Marine Corps operating forces had 40,364 Marines available to carry out the services assigned missions and tasks. The remainder of the Marine Corps active strength was contained in the supporting establishment (training, supply, administration, etc.), special assignments, and non-available personnel.³⁰⁴

Within the operating forces, the FMF had a total strength of 27,656, security detachments had 11,087, and 1,574 Marines were serving afloat with the U.S. Navy. FMFPAC had 11,853 Marines composed mainly within the 1st MARDIV, at approximately half-strength of a wartime division, with most of the remainder in the 1st Marine Air Wing.³⁰⁵ In response to North Korea's invasion of the South Korea on 25 June 1950, the United States began committing troops to support United Nations resolutions to repel the North Koreans. On 7 July 1950, the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade (Reinforced) was activated and formed around the 5th Marine Regiment and Marine Air Group-33. Seven days later, the brigade was now at a combat strength of

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Ernest H. Giusti, *The Mobilization of the Marine Corps Reserve in the Korean Conflict, 1950-1951* (Washington, DC: Historical Branch, G-3 Division, Headquarters, U.S. Marines Corps, 1967), 2.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

approximately 6,500 Marines and set sail from San Diego for the Far East aboard a task force of 10 ships.³⁰⁶ Unlike the 1st and 2nd MARDIVs' ability to respond in 1962, the Marine Corps did not have another division ready to deploy in July 1950.

While the 1st Provisional Marine Brigade was at sea heading west, General of the Army, Douglas MacArthur, Commander in Chief, Far East was pressing the JCS to send the entirety of the 1st MARDIV to support the planned amphibious landing at Inchon in mid-September. On 25 July 1950, the JCS approved MacArthur's request.³⁰⁷ The 1st MARDIV, having been stripped of most of its veteran personnel and equipment to support the 1st Marine Provisional Brigade, had just 3,459 Marines at Camp Pendleton in late July 1950, a shell of its needed wartime strength and not even enough to man a single full-strength regiment. Elements of the 2nd MARDIV from Camp Lejeune and reservists from all over the country began to pour into Camp Pendleton to bring the division up to war-time strength. On 4 August, the 1st and 7th Marine Regiments were reactivated and by 7 August, the 1st MARDIV strength was up to 17,162 Marines.³⁰⁸ The mount-out of the 1st MARDIV began the next day and on 14 August, lead elements of the 1st Marine Regiment set sail, just 10 days after the unit had been activated. The forming and deployment of the 7th Marine Regiment took considerably more time as a result of its assigned units being even more fractured, as well as a shortage of available naval

³⁰⁶ Capt John C. Chapin, USMC (Ret) "Fire Brigade: U.S. Marines in the Pusan Perimeter," in *U.S. Marines in the Korean War*, ed. Charles R. Smith (Washington, DC: History Division, U.S. Corps, 2007), 14-16.

³⁰⁷ BGen Edwin H. Simmons, USMC (Ret), "Over the Seawall: U.S. Marine at Inchon," in Smith, 78.

³⁰⁸ Simmons, 80.

shipping on the West Coast. By 1 September, the 7th Marine Regiment and the 1st MARDIV had completed its embarkation and set sail from San Diego.³⁰⁹

The significance of comparing the two deployments, 1950 and 1962, is the stark difference in the peacetime posture of the forces at those times. In 1950, even with 79 amphibious ships in the U.S. Navy's active fleet, there was a shortage of shipping available to lift the 1st MARDIV from San Diego on a rapid timeline. Additionally, the Marine Corps did not have any large formations available for immediate deployment and needed over a month to fill the ranks of the 1st MARDIV, gather enough shipping, complete embarkation, and set sail for the Korean Peninsula. In 1962, the Navy and Marine Corps was in a much better position to provide ready, trained, and flexible forces in response to a crisis. Additionally, contingency planning, such as that outlined in chapter 4, helped reduce reaction times and streamline the deployment of forces to support President Kennedy's objectives during the Cuban Missile Crisis. One can imagine that if it took the Marine Corps, and U.S. armed forces as a whole, over a month to mobilize, deploy, and be in position to execute an invasion of Cuba to eliminate the ballistic missile threat, that Khrushchev may have been successful in making his missiles operational and forcing Kennedy to accept the missiles status as fait accompli. That analysis, however, is beyond the scope of this paper, as the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps were in fact poised and ready to execute the invasion should President Kennedy have desired.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., 83.

Takeaways for Operational Level Staff Planners

A common cliché for military officers and planners is that intelligence drives operations. The iterative review of the Cuban enemy situation drove regular updates to the Cuban Contingency Plans by Admiral Dennison and his staff at the Atlantic Command, as well as at subordinate commands and units involved, such as the XVIII Airborne Corps. Consider that in late 1959, just 10 light airborne companies were designated as the assault force for operations in Cuba. The JCS considered this size force more than adequate considering the more chaotic environment in Cuba as Castro continued to consolidate power and reorganize a Cuban military force.³¹⁰ Meanwhile, as the size and capabilities of Cuba's military increased over the next few years, so too did the size of the American invasion force reaching a total of five reinforced divisions and approximately 125,000 personnel.³¹¹

The frequent updates, changes, and additions to the 5th MEB mission and contingency plans also provides an excellent example of continuous planning occurring at the staff level, required landing plan corrections by the Brigade Embarkation Section notwithstanding. By mid-December, as the crisis was ending for the 5th MEB, the brigade staff had completed detailed planning on two additional amphibious assaults near Mariel and Matanzas and made several updates their previous plans in existence

³¹⁰ Kugler, III-6.

³¹¹ Ibid., III-26 to III-28.

regarding the reinforcement of Guantanamo Naval Base and operations near the Yateras River in support of Admiral Dennison's OPLAN 316-62.³¹²

By continually adapting and remaining flexible, the 5th MEB, II MEF, Second Fleet, XVIII Airborne Corps, and the Atlantic Command were able to mobilize and project a powerful combat force that was ready to invade on Cuba on very short notice in support of national objectives. It was this capability to plan effectively, combined with the quick actions that the Navy, Army, and Marine Corps units took in positioning and deploying their forces that compelled Premier Khrushchev to reach a quick and peaceful settlement with President Kennedy.

³¹² *Command Diary of the 5th MEB, 5-30 Nov 62*, 6; see also 5th MEB OPLAN Plan 316-62, 1.

APPENDIX A

CHAIN OF COMMAND AND KEY PERSONNEL

DURING THE CUBAN MISSILE CRISIS

National Level

President	John F. Kennedy
Secretary of Defense	Robert S. McNamara
Director of Central Intelligence	John A. McCone
Chairman, JCS	General Maxwell D. Taylor
Army Chief of Staff	General Earle G. Wheeler
Air Force Chief of Staff	General Curtis E. LeMay
Chief of Naval Operations	Admiral George W. Anderson
Commandant of the Marine Corps	General David M. Shoup

East Coast

CINCLANT/CINCLANTFLT/SACLANT	Admiral Robert L. Dennison
- CINCLANT Deputy and CofS	Vice Admiral Wallace M. Beakley
- CDR, Cuban Contingency Staff (JTF-4)	Lieutenant General Louis H. Truman
CINCAFLANT (COMTAC)	General Walter C. "Cam" Sweeney
CG, 19th Air Force	Major General Maurice A. Preston
COMARLANT (CONARC)	General Herbert B. Powell
CG, U.S. Third Army	Lieutenant General Trapnell
CG, XVIII Airborne Corps	Lieutenant General Hamilton H. Howze
COMSECONDFLT	Vice Admiral Alfred "Corky" Ward
COMPHIBLANT	Vice Admiral Horatio Rivero, Jr.
FMFLANT/II MEF	Lieutenant General Robert B. Lucky
CG, 2nd Marine Division	Major General Frederick L. Weiseman
COMANTDEFCON	Rear Admiral Allen H. Smith
CG, GTMO Ground Def Force	Brigadier General William R. Collins

West Coast

CINCPAC	Admiral Harry Donald Felt
CINCPACFLT	Admiral John H. Sides
COMPHIBPAC	Vice Admiral Howard A. Yeager
CG, FMFPAC	Lieutenant General Carson A. Roberts
CG, AIRFMFPAC	Major General Avery. R. Kier
CG, 1st MARDIV	Major General Herman Nickerson, Jr.
CG, 5th MEB	Brigadier General William T. Fairbourn
COMPHIBGRU-3	Rear Admiral Neis C. Johnson

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