



Naval Station Guantanamo Bay

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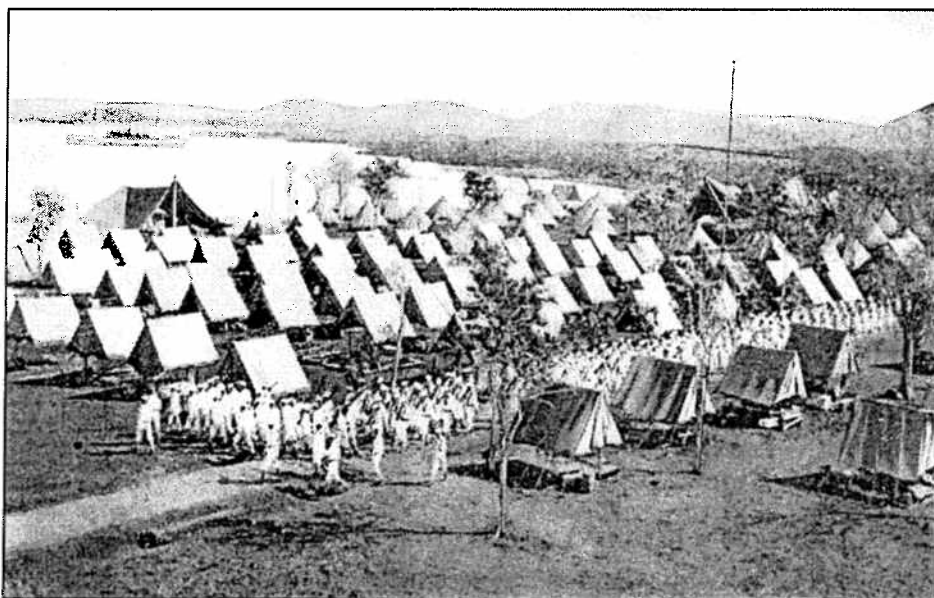
Naval Base Guantanamo - Part of Commander Navy Region Southeast

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History of Guantanamo Bay



Fleet camp at Deer Point, circa 1910.

Located in the Oriente Province on the southeast corner of Cuba, the base is about 400 air miles from Miami, Fla.

In February 1903, the United States leased 45 square miles of land and water at Guantanamo Bay for use as a coaling (fueling) station. The treaty was finalized and the document ratified by both governments and signed in Havana in December 1903.

A 1934 treaty reaffirming the lease granted Cuba and her trading partners free access through the bay, modified the lease payment from \$2,000 in gold coins per year, to the 1934 equivalent value of \$4,085 U.S. Treasury dollars, and added a requirement that termination of the lease requires the consent of both the U.S. and Cuba governments, or the U.S. abandonment of the base property.

Base relations with Cuba remained stable through two world wars and the periods between, and did not significantly change until the Cuban revolution in the late 1950's. That revolution led by Fidel Castro, began in the hills of Oriente Province, not far from the base.

On June 27, 1958, 29 Sailors and Marines returning from liberty outside the base gates were kidnapped by Cuban rebel forces headed by Raul Castro, brother of Fidel, and detained in the hills as hostages until they were finally released 22 days later.

United States and Cuban relations steadily declined as Fidel Castro openly declared himself in favor of the Marxist line, and began mass jailing and executions of the Cuban people. Cuban territory outside the confines of the base limits was declared off limits to U.S. servicemen and civilians on Jan. 1, 1959.

Official diplomatic relations with Cuba were severed in January 1961 by President Dwight Eisenhower just prior to the inauguration of President John F. Kennedy. At this time, many Cubans sought refuge on the base and many still live and work here today.

In October 1962, family members of service people stationed here and many base employees were evacuated to the United States as President Kennedy announced the presence of Soviet missiles in Cuba. This was the start of the Cuban Missile Crisis which resulted in a naval quarantine of the island until the Soviet Union removed the missiles. The evacuees were allowed to return to the base by that Christmas.

Another crisis arose just 14 months later on Feb. 6, 1964, when Castro cut off water and supply avenues to the base in retaliation for several incidents in which Cuban fishermen were being fined by the U.S. government for fishing in Florida waters.

For more than 40 years, Guantanamo Bay has been totally self-sufficient with its own power and water sources.

In 1991, the station's mission was expanded as some 34,000 Haitian refugees passed through Guantanamo Bay. The refugees fled Haiti after a violent coup brought on by political and social upheaval in their country. The naval base received the Navy Unit Commendation and Joint Meritorious Unit Award for its effort.

In May 1994, Operation Sea Signal began and the base was tasked to support Joint Task Force 160, providing humanitarian assistance to thousands of Haitian and Cuban migrants. In late August and early September 1994, 2,200 family members and civilian employees were evacuated from the base as the migrant population climbed to more than 45,000, and the Pentagon began preparing to house up to 60,000 migrants on the base.

The last Haitian migrants departed here Nov. 1, 1995. The last of the Cuban migrants left the base Jan. 31, 1996. Family members were authorized to return in October 1995, marking an end to family separations. An immediate effort began to restore base facilities for family use, including reopening the child development center, youth center, two schools and Sunday school. Additionally, the revitalization of Boy and Girl Scout Camps and the Guantanamo Bay Youth Activities (a sports program for children) were initiated.

Since Sea Signal, Guantanamo Bay has retained its migrant operations assistance mission with a migrant population of less than 30. The base has also been involved in two contingency migrant operations: Operation Marathon in October 1996, and Present Haven in February 1997. Both of these short-fused events involved the interception of Chinese migrants being smuggled into the United States.

After 52 years of service, Guantanamo's largest tenant command, Fleet Training Group, relocated to Mayport, Florida, in July 1995. One month later, the naval base lost another major tenant command when the base's Shore Intermediate Maintenance Activity disestablished after 92 years of service here.

Tenant commands of the station include the U.S. Naval Hospital and Branch Dental Clinic, detachments of the Personnel Support Activity, Naval Atlantic Meteorology and Oceanography Command, Naval Media Center, Naval Communications Station, Department of Defense Dependent Schools, Navy Brig and Fleet and Industrial Supply Center (FISC), Det GTMO.

Directly supporting the base are offices of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service, Resident Officer in Charge of Construction, Human Resources Office, Fleet and Family Support Center, Red Cross, and the Navy Exchange and Commissary.

The most recent addition to the base is the Southern Command Joint Task Force-Guantanamo. Following the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, 2001, Joint Task Force-Guantanamo was tasked to stand up the War on Terrorism detainee mission.

For a more detailed history of Guantanamo Bay see the history written by RADM M.E. Murphy:

The History of Guantanamo Bay 1494-1964

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