

## CIVIL AFFAIRS IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

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### Description

Following the assassination of Rafael Trujillo in May of 1961, the Dominican Republic descended into a state of political turmoil. On December 20, 1962, Juan Bosch, one of the Dominican's most esteemed writers, defeated Viriatio Fiallo in the country's first clean election. Upon taking power, Bosch began a campaign of rapid reforms, which included a new liberal constitution allowing for the creation of labor unions. The Catholic Church took an automatic dislike to Bosch for his attempts to "secularize" the country as did the military leadership who had grown nostalgic for the free rein they enjoyed under the Trujillo dictatorship. The United States government was also not without its suspicions concerning Bosch's left leaning politics and feared the rise of another communist state so close to its shores.

On September 26, 1963, President Bosch was removed from power after only seven short months, following a military coup led by Colonel Elias Wessin. Authority was then transferred to a three man military junta, which ruled for slightly less than two years. However, following mounting dissatisfaction with the junta's rule, two Dominican Army battalions openly revolted against the military leadership on April 24, 1965 demanding the return of President Bosch. Calling themselves the "Constitutionalists" these rebels were joined by several other Dominican leftist groups including the communists. Within less than 24 hours, these rebels managed to seize control of almost all of Santo Domingo.<sup>1</sup> Fearing that the military junta and its forces, then known as the "Loyalists," would not be able to regain power and stave off what appeared to the American government to be a communist revolution, the USS Boxer and 1,500 marines were ordered to station off the Dominican Coast.<sup>2</sup>

### Key Actors

- **Blue:**
  - United States Military
  - Organization of American States (OAS) Diplomats
    - Ilmar Penna Marinho (Brazil)
    - Ramon de Clairmont Dunas (El Salvador)
    - Ellsworth Bunker (United States)<sup>3</sup>
  - USAID

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<sup>1</sup>Major Lawrence M. Greenberg, USA, "Intervention in Three-Part Harmony: The 1965 U.S. Dominican Intervention, *Naval Historical Center*, 1.

<sup>2</sup>GlobalSecurity.org, "Operation Powerpack," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/powerpack.htm>.

<sup>3</sup>General Bruce Palmer Jr., *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965*, (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky), 1989, 58.

- United States State Department
- **Green:** Organization of American States Partners
  - Brazil
  - Honduras
  - El Salvador
  - Costa Rica
  - Nicaragua
  - Paraguay
- **Brown:**
  - Dominican Red Cross
  - U.S. Peace Corps
  - CARE
  - Caritas
  - Church World Service
  - Other NGOs were present on the ground but were not specifically named in CA reports due to their lack of cooperation with the U.S. military
- **Red:**
  - “Constitutionalists” (Not all of the rebels were in fact communists, some simply wished to see the return of President Bosch)

### **Objectives & End States**

On April 29, 1965, 1,400 marines were ordered into Santo Domingo to form a safety zone stretching from the U.S. Embassy to the Embajador Hotel, where U.S. citizens living in the capital had gathered for safety. Over the course of a week, these marines airlifted approximately 8,000 civilians from Santo Domingo to San Juan. Over 1,500 of these individuals were non-U.S. citizens from over 30 countries. While there is no doubt that the U.S. military’s initial intervention in the Dominican Republic was to ensure the safety of American citizens, its reasons for staying were less concrete.

What came to be known as Operation POWER PACK had three primary objectives:

- Evacuate all non-military U.S. personnel
- Defeat the Dominican rebels and restore order to Santo Domingo
- Re-install a democratic government in the Dominican Republic

Following Johnson’s orders to evacuate all U.S. citizens from the Dominican Republic, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Secretary of State Dean Rusk urged the President not to involve the United States further. By 1965, the U.S. military leadership was focused solely on the escalating conflict in Vietnam and was thus less than prepared for another foreign intervention. Initial meetings concerning the Dominican rebellion at the executive level did not include any high ranking military officials to argue the dangers of another long term occupation of a hostile nation. Despite warnings, President

Johnson was determined not to let another domino fall in his backyard and on May 7, 1965 in a televised address he declared “We will defend our nation against all those who seek to destroy not only the United States but every free country of this hemisphere.”<sup>4</sup> It was thus apparent that the U.S mission in the Dominican was to extend beyond the evacuation of civilians.

On April 30, 1965, two battalions of paratroopers from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division under the command of Major General Robert York landed at San Isidro Airfield ten miles from the Dominican Capital of Santo Domingo. Over the course of the next week over 23,000 U.S. soldiers arrived in the Dominican Republic.<sup>5</sup> It quickly became apparent to General York that military matters in the Dominican would be taking a backseat to diplomatic considerations. While President Johnson wanted the rebellion ended quickly, he did not want to risk any unnecessary collateral damage that might push the Dominicans into the arms of the communists. After being informed that an American invasion of the Dominican Republic was also a violation of the non-intervention clause of the Organization of American States (OAS) Charter, Johnson also sought to appease the governments of several Latin American countries by involving them as much as possible in later peacekeeping efforts.<sup>6</sup>

In response to pressure from the OAS, U.S. forces were eventually put under the command of an Inter-American Force consisting of 1,800 troops from Brazil, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Paraguay.<sup>7</sup> While Lieutenant General Palmer adamantly opposed this change in the command structure, it was deemed necessary to give the U.S. mission in Haiti international legitimacy.<sup>8</sup> While the overt mission of U.S. forces in the Dominican Republic was to suppress what was believed to be a communist rebellion, the leadership back in Washington desired the operation to be viewed as a humanitarian mission by the international community.

### **Operational Strategies/Key Missions and Tasks**

When the 42<sup>nd</sup> Civil Affairs (CA) Company arrived in Santo Domingo they found the Dominicans to be living in terribly unsanitary conditions. The capital was littered with refuse, lacked potable water, and suffered from frequent power outages. When the U.S. military first entered Santo Domingo, they also found the Dominicans to be practically starving. After distributing all the C rations they could, CA personnel were finally able to begin mass food distribution on May 3<sup>rd</sup>. With the help of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne, CA personnel passed out rice, powdered milk, beans, cooking oil, water and clothing to Dominicans on both sides of the conflict. A total of 15,000 tons of food and 15,000

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<sup>4</sup> GlobalSecurity.org, “Operation Powerpack,” <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/powerpack.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Stanley Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come and Sorry to See Them Go: A History of U.S. Army Tactical Civil Affairs/Military Government, 1775-1991*, U.S. Army Special Operations Command History and Archives Division, 1993, 351.

<sup>6</sup> Major Lawrence M. Greenberg, USA, “Intervention in Three-Part Harmony: The 1965 U.S. Dominican Intervention, 4.

<sup>7</sup> General Bruce Palmer Jr., *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965*, 72.

<sup>8</sup> Major Lawrence M. Greenberg, USA, “Intervention in Three-Part Harmony: The 1965 U.S. Dominican Intervention, 5.

pounds of clothing were distributed over the course of the 17 months U.S. forces spent in the Dominican Republic.<sup>9</sup> In addition to food donated by the US government, USAID also purchased rice from Dominican vendors so as to not adversely affect local prices.<sup>10</sup> Not having much experience performing crowd control in highly impoverished areas, the troops on the ground were not prepared when their food convoys were overrun by masses of hungry people. The CA teams learned from this experience and besides paying more attention to security at food distribution stations, they also began issuing ration cards to each family.<sup>11</sup>

Despite lacking much of the skills and equipment needed to operate large facilities such as waterworks and power plants, the military engineers were able to bring all of Santo Domingo's main municipal plants back on line with help from civilian experts.<sup>12</sup> CA personnel further improved the Dominicans quality of life by opening several medical clinics in the capital and surrounding countryside. Before the arrival of U.S. forces, Dominican hospitals were overcrowded and lacked basic hygienic standards. In those days, it was not uncommon for surgery to be conducted by candlelight in Dominican hospitals.<sup>13</sup>

Due to an insufficient number of CA personnel in the Dominican Republic, other members of the military were often called upon to perform missions that they were unaccustomed to doing. The lack of Spanish speaking personnel in the U.S. military further complicated these tasks.<sup>14</sup> Despite some initial complaining, military engineers were responsible for removing all of the trash from the streets of Santo Domingo. Many members of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne also spent money out of their own pockets to unofficially "adopt" several orphanages in Santo Domingo. Soldiers would often play with the children in their free time, sometimes even entertaining them with helicopter rides.<sup>15</sup>

While CA personnel were able to respond well to the basic needs of the people of Santo Domingo despite the lack of civic action planning prior to the intervention, the Dominicans living in the countryside suffered from a lack of civil-military coordination.<sup>16</sup> Because several USAID and DoS aid distribution centers were located in hostile areas, the U.S. military often had to assume responsibility for them. However, after these areas were declared safe, the military often failed to inform their civilian counterparts that it was safe to return, thus denying Dominicans living in the area access to food and medical treatment.

Finally, due to the unclear legality of the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic, civil affairs personnel were unable to provide valuable advice on governance reform to

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<sup>9</sup> General Bruce Palmer Jr., *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965*, 137.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence A. Yates, *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Combat Studies Institute, 1988), 135.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 133.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> The majority of Spanish speaking military personnel were deployed to Vietnam at the time.

<sup>15</sup> Lawrence A. Yates, *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 134.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

the Dominican ministries. CA personnel attempted to coordinate with the Dominican Health Minister to improve conditions in the country's hospitals, however, the minister refused to cooperate out of fear of being seen as a collaborator.<sup>17</sup> Since there was no legal framework such as a UN resolution authorizing the U.S. military's mission in the Dominican Republic, CA personnel could not compel members of the Dominican government to accept their help.

### **Order of Battle**

At its height, Operation POWER PACK consisted of 23,000 U.S. soldiers from both the active duty and the Reserves. 21,500 of these troops came from the U.S. Army with rest of the forces being made up of 1,500 U.S. Marines.<sup>18</sup> The Marines were the first to deploy in the Dominican Republic on April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1965. Their mission was to clear a safety corridor between the U.S. Embassy in Santo Domingo and the Embajador Hotel, where U.S. citizens living in the capital had gathered for safety.

Fearing the encroachment of U.S. forces into Latin America, the Organization of American States (OAS) insisted upon playing a part in the Dominican intervention. While U.S. commanders originally balked at the idea of allowing their forces to be put under the command of a Brazilian, General Penasco Alvim, the political leadership in Washington decided that such a move would give the U.S. military international cover for the invasion and temporary occupation of the Dominican Republic. Overall the OAS contributed approximately 1,800 troops from Brazil, Honduras, Nicaragua, Paraguay and El Salvador.<sup>19</sup>

The initial invasion of the Dominican was led by Major General Robert York. However, after having been commander of U.S. forces in the Dominican for just one day, he was replaced by Lieutenant General Bruce Palmer Jr. on April 30<sup>th</sup>.<sup>20</sup> This move had less to do with General York's leadership ability and more to do with the lack of planning that had been done for the intervention in the first place. General Palmer was believed to be better suited than General York to lead the mission despite the fact that it was already underway.

The first contingent of CA troops from the 42<sup>nd</sup> CA Company arrived in the Dominican on May 2<sup>nd</sup> and were assigned to the XVIII Airborne Corps. The CA personnel deployed to the Dominican were all Reservists selected on the basis of their particular specialties. A high premium was placed on those individuals with familiarity with the Spanish language and who possessed a B.S. in economics.<sup>21</sup> Despite being assigned to the XVIII Airborne Corps, CA personnel in the Dominican Republic operated independently for the

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<sup>17</sup> Lawrence A. Yates, *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 135.

<sup>18</sup> Stanley Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come and Sorry to See Them Go: A History of U.S. Army Tactical Civil Affairs/Military Government, 1775-1991*, 351.

<sup>19</sup> General Bruce Palmer Jr., *Intervention in the Caribbean: The Dominican Crisis of 1965*, 72.

<sup>20</sup> Major Lawrence M. Greenberg, USA, "Intervention in Three-Part Harmony: The 1965 U.S. Dominican Intervention," *Naval Historical Center*, 1-3.

<sup>21</sup> Stanley Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come and Sorry to See Them Go: A History of U.S. Army Tactical Civil Affairs/Military Government, 1775-1991*, 351.

most part due to the lack of cooperation shown to them by other U.S. agencies operating on the ground.<sup>22</sup>

### **End-Means Relationships/Final Thoughts**

While the civil affairs mission in the Dominican Republic was quite limited compared to other major U.S. interventions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the overall mission was nonetheless successful. In the end, the key to winning the hearts and minds of the Dominicans and keeping them out of the arms of the communists had less to do with the distribution of food and more to do with the strict discipline demonstrated by the troops on the ground. Intelligence estimates never put the rebel faction at more than 4,000 men, which after three weeks of fighting had been isolated in just two districts of Santo Domingo.<sup>23</sup> The U.S. military could have forced the rebels into submission through a series of artillery barrages and mass raids on the populated areas in which they sought refuge. However, the use of artillery and high caliber weaponry was prohibited by the strict rules of engagement (ROE) insisted upon by the political leadership in Washington.<sup>24</sup>

In an effort to minimize civilian casualties, U.S. soldiers were asked to continually risk their own safety in order to follow the increasingly restrictive ROE, the purpose of which was to not further anger the Dominican population who already saw the U.S. military as a force of occupation. U.S. soldiers were forced to suffer nightly sniper attacks without being allowed to fire back into the darkness for fear of inflicting collateral damage.<sup>25</sup> In the end, the Dominican people were grateful for the restraint shown by the U.S. military, which not only minimized the amount of bloodshed normally seen in civil wars, but also gave the Loyalists and the Constitutionals breathing room to come to a diplomatic solution.

### **Recommendations**

1. A clear legal justification is needed for all future U.S. military interventions abroad. Without an internationally recognized sanction, civil affairs personnel are not capable of compelling foreign officials to accept their guidance on strengthening their government institutions.
2. Civil-military communication is vital to ensure that the needs of the host population are being met.
3. The language skills of the U.S. military needed to be improved if they wish to conduct successful civil affairs missions in the future.
4. Purchasing food from local vendors can prevent costly price fluctuations in local markets.

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<sup>22</sup> Stanley Sandler, *Glad to See Them Come and Sorry to See Them Go: A History of U.S. Army Tactical Civil Affairs/Military Government, 1775-1991*, 351.

<sup>23</sup> Lawrence A. Yates, *Power Pack: U.S. Intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, 106.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

## Order of Battle

<b>Divisions</b>	<b>Capabilities</b>	<b>Forces Serving</b>
U.S. Army	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 42<sup>nd</sup> Civil Affairs Company</li> <li>• XVIII Airborne Corps</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> Army Brigade</li> <li>• 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division</li> </ul>	21,500
U.S. Marine Corps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4th Marine Expeditionary Unit</li> </ul>	1,500
Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Infantry Battalion</li> <li>• 1 Signal Unit</li> <li>• 1 MP Battalion</li> <li>• 1 Company of Marines</li> </ul>	Total Organization of American States (OAS) force was approximately 1,800
Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Each contributed 1 Rifle Company</li> </ul>	Total OAS force was approximately 1,800
Costa Rica	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 Platoon of MPs</li> </ul>	Total OAS force was approximately 1,800
El Salvador	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sent General Staff Officers</li> </ul>	Total OAS force was approximately 1,800