

Cuban Missile Crisis United States Naval Aviation Operations

17 April 1961 *Brigadistas* (Cuban exiles) of Brigade 2506 opposed to the regime of Fidel R. Castro sailed from British Honduras (Belize) for Bahía de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs), Cuba, during Operation Zapata—an attempt to overthrow Castro. The U.S. concentrated naval support for the émigrés initially within Task Group Alpha (81.8), including *Essex* (CVS 9), with CVSG-60 embarked. Aircraft from *Essex* were to fly CAP over the invader's landing craft and reconnaissance flights over Castro's forces and comprised—12 McDonnell Douglas A4D-2 Skyhawks of VA-34, two Grumman S2F-1 Trackers and eight S2F-1Ss of VS-34, four Douglas AD5-W Skyraiders of VAW-12 Detachment 45, 15 Sikorsky HSS-1 Seabats of HS-9, one Piasecki (Vertol) HUP-3 Retriever of HU-2 Detachment 45, and one Grumman TF-1 Trader. To accommodate the Skyhawks on board *Essex* the S2F-1s of VS-39 temporarily operated from NAS Quonset Point, R.I.

Independence (CVA 62), with CVG-7 embarked, sailed to host President John F. Kennedy for a scheduled naval firepower demonstration from NS Norfolk, Va. The crisis compelled the cancellation of the chief executive's visit and *Independence* made for the area south of NS Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. The U.S. did not intervene, however, and Castro rushed reinforcements that forced the evacuation or surrender of the *brigadistas* by 20 April. *Essex* returned to Quonset Point on 29 April. *Independence* did not reach the area in time to affect the outcome and came about, on 30 April anchoring in Hampton Roads, Va.

25 July 1962 Following the defeat of Gen. Fulgencio Batista, Cuban leftists led by Fidel R. Castro harassed NS Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. In response to U.S. fears of an escalation to coincide with the celebration of the 26th of July Cuban revolutionary holiday, the Caribbean Ready Amphibious Squadron sailed for Guantánamo and aircraft flew demonstrations over the station until the termination of the alert on 27 July.

30 August 1962 One of two Cuban *GC-107* class patrol boats shot at a Grumman S-2 Tracker flying in international air space 15 nautical miles north of Cárdenas, Cuba.

8 September 1962 Two Cuban MiG-17 Frescos overtook Grumman S2F Numbers 13 and 16 over the Caribbean 45 miles southwest of NAS Key West, Fla. One Fresco made simulated firing runs on the Trackers, but two Douglas F4D-1 Skyrays scrambled from Key West and the MiGs disengaged.

18 September 1962 A joint Army-Navy-Air Force regulation established a uniform system of designating military aircraft similar to that previously in use by the USAF. All existing aircraft received redesignations using a letter, dash, number, and letter to indicate—in that order—the basic mission or type of aircraft, its place in the series of that type, and its place in the series of changes in its basic design. Under the system the LTV Crusader, formerly designated F8U-2, became the F-8C indicating the third change (C) in the eighth (8) of the fighter (F) series. A provision indicated the status of the aircraft and modifications of its basic mission by prefix letters. Thus the YF8U-1P became the YRF-8A symbolizing a prototype (Y) of the photoreconnaissance (R) modification of the F-8A.

19 September 1962 During growing tensions with the Cubans, six LTV F-8D Crusaders deployed for defensive duties with the USAF in the North American Air Defense Command to NAS Key West, Fla.

28 September 1962 A Navy flight photographed Soviet freighter *Kasimov* en route to Cuban waters with ten crated Ilyushin Il-28s on her deck. The Soviets eventually deployed at least 42 of the Beagles, which were capable of carrying nuclear bombs, to Cuba.

1 October 1962 On the eve of the Cuban Missile Crisis the Atlantic Fleet included: *Essex* (CVS 9), *Lake Champlain* (CVS 39), and *Wasp* (CVS 18) in the area of Boston, Mass., and Newport, R.I.; *Intrepid* (CVS 11) off New York City, N.Y.; *Randolph* (CVS 15) at NS Norfolk, Va.; *Shangri-La* (CVA 38) at NS Mayport, Fla.; amphibious assault ships *Boxer* (LPH 4), *Okinawa* (LPH 3), and *Thetis Bay* (LPH 6) at Norfolk; and cruiser *Canberra* (CAG 2) at NS Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

8 October 1962 The McDonnell Douglas F-4B Phantom IIs of VF-41 shifted from NAS Oceana, Va., to NAS Key West, Fla., to augment a detachment of six F-8D Crusaders for defensive duties with the USAF in the North American Air Defense Command during growing tensions with the Cubans.

14 October 1962 During this period, Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchëv grew concerned over the imbalance in the nuclear arsenals of the rival superpowers and launched Operation Anadyr—the infiltration into Cuba of surface-to-surface missiles capable of being fitted with nuclear warheads to expand Soviet options, and to demonstrate to the Americans their inability to halt the advance of Soviet power in close proximity to the U.S. Cuban leader Fidel R. Castro agreed to the plan. On this date, Maj. Richard D. Heyser, USAF, piloted CIA high-altitude reconnaissance Mission 3101 over western Cuba in a Lockheed U-2F designated Article 342 and detected Soviet SS-4 (R-12) Sandal medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) launchers. Navy specialists processed the film and then delivered it for evaluation to the National Photographic Interpretation Center, Washington, D.C. Additional reconnaissance missions and intelligence data revealed more MRBMs and SS-5 (R-14) Skean intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The discovery of the Soviet deception precipitated the Cuban Missile Crisis, because President John F. Kennedy and his advisors considered such a threat to the U.S. unacceptable.

17 October 1962 Operation Blue Moon became operational—low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba to help verify Soviet military deployments to that country. VFP-62 initially prepared ten photo variant LTV RF-8A Crusaders with aerial cameras for high-speed, low-level runs for photo missions, and placed four of the jets on a four hour alert at NAS Cecil Field, Fla., but subsequently shifted the Crusaders to NAS Key West, Fla. The squadron maintained ten operational aircraft with seven standing by, and also deployed five detachments on board attack carriers operating in the Atlantic and Mediterranean during the Cuban Missile Crisis.

19 October 1962 Operational units began moving to stations in Florida to counter the threat posed by Soviet missiles and bombers in Cuba. Aircraft and squadrons in Florida not required for air defense, reconnaissance, and antisubmarine patrols began relocating to prevent overcrowding

at those facilities. About 350 naval aircraft operated ashore in that region including: seven fighters, 12 bombers, and five maritime patrol aircraft at NS Guantánamo Bay, Cuba; 18 fighters at Homestead AFB Fla.; 76 fighters, 57 attack, and ten patrol at NAS Jacksonville, Fla.; 26 fighters and five antisubmarine at NAS Key West, Fla.; 12 Lockheed EC-121K Constellations at McCoy AFB Fla.; 15 patrol at NAS Roosevelt Roads, P.R.; and 11 North American A-5A Vigilantes of VAH-7 at NAS Sanford, Fla. By 25 October the number of these aircraft ashore rose to 448 fighters and bombers and 67 reconnaissance and support types.

19 October 1962 *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) sortied in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis from NS Norfolk, Va. The emergency compelled the ship to sail with only some aircraft and the balance flew on board as she passed Cape Henry. The Atlantic Fleet provided the cover story that engineering exercises and Hurricane Ella off the southeastern coast of the U.S. imposed the rapid departure. Aircraft flew a daily average of 120 sorties from *Enterprise* during the crisis. The ship returned on 7 December.

20 October 1962 The Cuban Missile Crisis coincided with a routine amphibious training exercise designated PHIBBRIGLEX 62 (Quick Kick)—an amphibious brigade landing exercise. More than 40 ships including *Independence* (CVA 62), *Randolph* (CVS 15), and amphibious assault ships *Okinawa* (LPH 3) and *Thetis Bay* (LPH 6) were scheduled to take part by November. On this date the Atlantic Fleet publicly used the excuse that Hurricane Ella scattered ships to begin to reassign these forces to respond to the crisis.

20 October 1962 Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet Adm. Robert L. Dennison ordered the North American A-5A Vigilantes of VAH-7 to transfer from *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) to NAS Sanford, Fla. Twenty-one McDonnell Douglas A-4C Skyhawks of VMA-225 from MCAS Cherry Point, N.C., replaced them on board because the lighter characteristics of the Skyhawks made them more suitable for close air support. Cargo aircraft carried maintainers and equipment from ashore. On 5 December the A-4Cs completed these first Marine squadron operations from a nuclear-powered carrier. In addition, *Enterprise* received orders to steam near 25°N, 75°W, and *Independence* (CVA 62) toward 23°10'N, 72°24'W. The following morning the carriers rendezvoused north of the Bahamas.

22 October 1962 Intelligence data that unveiled Soviet progress in Cuba and the transfer of arms via East Bloc ships en route to the island prompted the Joint Chiefs to raise the U.S. defense posture from Defense Condition 5 to 3 for all forces worldwide at 1800 EDT—excluding forces in Europe that went to a precautionary stance. The Joint Chiefs issued the order prior to a televised speech by President John F. Kennedy from the Oval Room. The President announced “unmistakable evidence” of the Soviet intrusion into Cuba and emphasized three strategic points: the imposition of a “quarantine” on all offensive military equipment en route to Cuba effective at 1000 on 24 October; the continuation and increase of the close surveillance of Cuba; and a policy to regard any nuclear missile launched from Cuba against any nation in the Western Hemisphere as an attack by the Soviets on the U.S. During the speech submarines equipped with Polaris fleet ballistic missiles moved to their launch stations to supplement silo-launched intercontinental ballistic missiles and Strategic Air Command bombers.

23 October 1962 The first of three pairs of LTV RF-8As of VFP-62 flew the initial mission of

Operation Blue Moon—low-level reconnaissance flights over Cuba. Squadron CO Cmdr. William B. Ecker and Lt. C. Bruce Wilhelmy piloted the initial two photographic-equipped Crusaders during the first flight from NAS Key West, Fla., over San Cristóbal. The jets completed the mission undamaged; however, Ecker received orders to personally brief at the Pentagon Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, USA, CNO Adm. George W. Anderson, Jr., and Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. Curtis E. LeMay, USAF. Four RF-8As from VMCJ-2 together with USAF McDonnell RF-101C Voodoos and Douglas RB-66 Destroyers subsequently reinforced Blue Moon. Twelve of the sailors including Ecker and Wilhelmy and four Marines received the Distinguished Flying Cross. Through 15 November aircraft of all the services flew 158 low-level runs over Cuba.

24 October 1962 A blockade of Soviet offensive weapons into Cuba began. Task Force 136, Commander Second Fleet Vice Adm. Alfred G. Ward commanding, established patrol positions in a line designated Walnut to the east of Cuba beyond the known range of Soviet Ilyushin Il-28 Beagles flying from the island. Task Group 136.2, comprising at times *Essex* (CVS 9), *Randolph* (CVS 15), and *Wasp* (CVS 18), provided the principal operating forces. *Essex* operated 22 Grumman S-2D Trackers of VSs 34 and 39, 14 Sikorsky SH-3A Sea Kings of HS-9, and one Grumman E-1B Tracer of VAW 12 Detachment 9. Eleven Lockheed P-5B Marlins each of VPs 45 and 49 of Task Group 81.5 patrolled to the north and east of 25°N, 65°W, and 11 Lockheed P-2E Neptunes of VP-5 of Task Group 81.7 patrolled east of the quarantine line and south of 25°N. These planes proved crucial to the detection of East Bloc ships and the verification of their cargoes. Commander in Chief Atlantic Fleet Adm. Robert L. Dennison later redesignated the blockade line Chestnut, moving the perimeter closer to Cuba to reduce the number of ships at sea.

24 October 1962 Commander NS Guantánamo Bay Rear Adm. Edward J. O'Donnell requested that Task Force 135 including *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) and *Independence* (CVA 62) alternate continuous early warning patrols over the Windward Passage and cover the U.S. enclave from a Cuban attack. *Enterprise* and *Independence* operated south of the Windward Passage between Cuba and Hispaniola and southward. FAW-11 and MAG-26 deployed to NS Roosevelt Roads at Puerto Rico and to NS Guantánamo Bay, respectively, also supported these ships. Soviet threats against carriers sailing in Caribbean waters included four *Foxtrot* (*Project 641*) class submarines, 3R9/10 Luna (Free Rocket Over Ground or FROG-3/5) tactical surface-to-surface rockets, FKR (*frontoviye krilatiye raketi*—frontal rocket) 1 Metors (SSC-2A Salishes), 12 P-6 *Komar* (*Project 183-R*) class missile boats, up to 42 Ilyushin Il-28 Beagles, and MiG-21F Fishbed-Cs. Many of these weapons were capable of being fitted with nuclear warheads.

24 October 1962 The service tours of all U.S. officers and enlisted men incurred indefinite extensions because of the Cuban Missile Crisis.

24 October 1962 The Lockheed P-2H Neptunes of VP-11 deployed to Argentia, Newfoundland, on 12 hours notice in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis. The squadron's planes completed 1,065 flying hours of surveillance flights through 14 November 1962.

27 October 1962 Senior Soviet commander in Cuba Gen. Issa A. Pliyev informed his superiors

in Moscow that the SS-4 (R-12) Sandal medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba had become operational, despite heavy rain that delayed the completion of the final site. Pliyev stated his capability to send two salvos of 36 missiles against the U.S.

27 October 1962 Amphibious assault ship *Boxer* (LPH 4) embarked 20 Sikorsky UH-34D Seahorses of HMM-263, four Sikorsky CH-37C Mojaves, five Kaman OH-43Ds, and nine Cessna O-1 Bird Dogs at New River, N.C. The ship deployed with an additional 16 Seahorses to reinforce HMMs 261 and 264, operating from amphibious assault ships *Okinawa* (LPH 3) and *Thetis Bay* (LPH 6), respectively, and sailed for Caribbean waters in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis. Also on this date, *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2) embarked HMM-361 and a detachment of VMO-6 and sailed from the Pacific Fleet via the Panama Canal, in two weeks reaching the Caribbean.

28 October 1962 Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchëv accepted U.S. diplomatic overtures to end the Cuban Missile Crisis. Cuban leader Fidel R. Castro initially rejected the U.S. offer but subsequently consented to the agreement.

31 October 1962 By this point during the Cuban Missile Crisis, *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) steamed in a box within 60 miles of 18°N, 80°W.

5 November 1962 Two MiG-21F Fishbeds attacked the two LTV RF-8As Crusaders of VFP-62 comprising Flight 16, flying an Operation Blue Moon low-level reconnaissance mission eight miles west of Santa Clara, Cuba. The Crusaders turned and rolled into the MiGs for a head-on approach, then hit their afterburners and escaped six miles east of their point of entry over Cuba—the MiGs pursued for five minutes. The high combat air patrol observed the action but failed to intervene in time.

15 November 1962 To date, naval aircraft flew 9,000 sorties during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Sixty-eight squadrons comprising 19,000 sailors participated, and each of the eight deployed carriers steamed at least 10,000 miles.

16 November 1962 *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) and *Independence* (CVA 62) operated in a rectangle formed by 18°10'N, 19°30'N, 77°W, and 80°W in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis to 21 November. During this period the McDonnell Douglas A-4C Skyhawks of VA-34 switched places with the Skyhawks of VA-64 from *Enterprise* onto *Independence*, and VA-64 embarked on board *Enterprise*. Helos lifted the balance of the men between the carriers.

16 November 1962 *Saratoga* (CVA 60) began the Cuban Missile Crisis in overhaul at Norfolk Naval Shipyard, Va. On this date she sailed 15 days ahead of schedule, and on 5 December relieved *Enterprise* (CVAN 65).

20 November 1962 The Atlantic Fleet received direction to discontinue operations concerning the Cuban Missile Crisis, lift the quarantine, and return commands to normal tasks. The Soviets began to stand down their alerted forces. Through 20 December *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) supported the defense of NS Guantánamo Bay, Cuba. A second carrier was to be ready in the Norfolk, Va., to Mayport, Fla., area against the requirement for

sighting Soviet ships sailing from Cuban ports with Ilyushin Il-28 Beagles, and to support air-strikes against Soviet and Cuban forces in Cuba in the event of an escalation of the crisis. The following day the Department of Defense cancelled the extensions of service ordered on 24 October. By 2 December amphibious assault ships *Boxer* (LPH 4), *Okinawa* (LPH 3), and *Thetis Bay* (LPH 6) had returned to Norfolk. In addition, on 1 December *Iwo Jima* (LPH 2) sailed for the Pacific.

1 December 1962 Fleet Air Caribbean and Naval Air Bases, Tenth Naval District, were established and assigned as additional duties to Commander, Caribbean Sea Frontier.

15 December 1962 In response to the Cuban Missile Crisis *Enterprise* (CVAN 65) received orders to relieve *Lexington* (CVS 16), which had just completed her conversion from an attack to an antisubmarine carrier but still embarked fighters and bombers. From 30 November *Lexington* had stayed in the U.S. on call for the crisis, but because of the conclusion of the confrontation *Enterprise* did not return to war stations before the New Year.