

## Chapter 22:

# Relationships with the Military

From the Seminole Wars to the present day, South Florida has been the scene of military and paramilitary operations.<sup>1039</sup> Between the park's authorization and establishment, the U.S. beefed up its military presence in South Florida both before and after the nation entered World War II. The issue of the effects of military overflights on park values, therefore, was present from before the park's establishment in 1947. That event coincided with the onset of the Cold War between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, ensuring that a substantial military presence would remain in South Florida. As the nation's only subtropical region, the Everglades emerged as a favored place to test jungle warfare technologies. In the 1960s, as Cuba drew closer to the Soviet Union, the Cold War affected Everglades National Park in a surprising number of ways, reaching a crescendo during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, which had a long aftermath.

During World War II, the U.S. military greatly expanded its presence in Florida and other areas of the South where cold weather was less likely to interfere with its operations. On the park's doorstep, the U.S. Army Air Force operated Homestead Air Field from 1942 until the end of the war. There had been a naval base at Key West since the 1820s; seaplanes were stationed there from 1917; and Naval Air Station Key West was established in 1940. The Navy established Naval Air Station Miami at Opa Locka Airport in 1939. During the Second World War, there were temporary air bases all around the area, including those at Hollywood and Boca Raton. In 1940, when the U.S. was improving its defense capabilities, the NPS intervened with the War Department to prevent 4,800 acres within the park's maximum proposed boundary from becoming a bombing range.<sup>1040</sup>

Late in the war, Naval Air Station Miami was able to establish a bombing target on Otter Key, an 18-acre key located south of Rankin Bite and east of Flamingo. This bombing target was thought to have been included in a permit issued by the state of Florida in September 1944, but research by a Department of Defense contractor in 2010 failed to confirm this. The contractor was unable to find any documentation concerning the establishment of the Otter Key bombing target or the extent of target construction activity on the key. The Navy released the bombing target in late 1945. Pilots from Naval Air Station Miami likely would have fired .30 and .50 mm ammunition at the target and may have dropped practice bombs. A site visit in 2010 found .30 mm projectiles at the site, but no explosives residue, no bomb debris, no target

<sup>1039</sup> See chapter 1 for a brief summary of the Seminole Wars.

<sup>1040</sup> "Bombing Tract Plan Given Up," *Miami Herald*, May 16, 1940.

remains, and no evidence of cratering from bombs. The contractor concluded that munitions constituents at the site did not represent a risk to humans or environmental receptors.<sup>1041</sup>

## Homestead Air Force Base

As the nation went on a permanent war footing following the Korean War, the base at Homestead was reactivated in 1955 as Homestead Air Force Base (AFB).<sup>1042</sup> The Air Force soon expanded the facility and made it a key Strategic Air Command (SAC) base. The SAC was created in March 1946 to project American air power around the world. Its equipment included medium- and long-range bombers and reconnaissance aircraft. SAC planes carried the nuclear weapons that the U.S. relied on as a deterrent, and this Air Force command took the lead in developing missile-based warheads in the 1950s. The superb flying weather, large over-water ranges, and nearby Avon Park Bombing Range in south-central Florida made Homestead an unmatched location for a SAC base. Homestead was base of operations for the 823<sup>rd</sup> Air Division, consisting of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 379<sup>th</sup> Bomber Wings, and the 407<sup>th</sup> Air Refueling Squadron. The bombers were B-47 Stratojets until 1960, when B-52 Stratofortresses began to arrive. In February 1962, Superintendent Warren Hamilton and his wife attended a luncheon and reception celebrating the arrival of the first B-52H at Homestead AFB. The bombers carried atomic weapons and stayed on ready alert, parked on the runway and ready to be airborne in minutes (figure 22-1, A B-52 bomber and its mission).<sup>1043</sup>

In 1962, the 31<sup>st</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing moved to Homestead, which remained a SAC base until 1968, when the big bombers moved to Robbins Air Force Base in Georgia. In 1981, the fighter wing became the 31<sup>st</sup> Tactical Training Wing and began training F-4 pilots. In the 1980s, a reserve unit, the 482<sup>nd</sup> Tactical Fighter Wing, also began operating from Homestead. During this period, F-16s gradually replaced the F-4s. At its height, Homestead AFB employed 8,700 with an annual payroll of \$152 million. Estimated to pump about \$430 million into the local economy, the base was

1041 Parsons Infrastructure and Technology Group, *Final Site Inspection Report Otter Key Bomb Target, Monroe County, Florida, FUDS Project No. 104FL113401* (Jacksonville, Fla.: US-ACE, June 29, 2011), ES-1-ES-3, 1-1.

1042 In September 1946, the Air Force split off from the Army and became a coequal branch within the Department of Defense.

1043 Homestead Air Reserve Base, <http://www.homestead.afrc.af.mil/library/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=3401>; Lindsay T. Peacock, *Strategic Air Command* (London: Arms & Armour Press, 1988), 38, 69, 91; Monika Mayr, *Everglades Betrayal: The Issue That Defeated Al Gore* (Minneapolis: Two Harbors Press, 2008), 3-4; SMR, Feb. 1962.



Figure 22-1. A B-52 bomber and its mission

a driver of South Dade's prosperity. The base remained a training facility until August 1992, when it took a direct hit from Hurricane Andrew (see below).<sup>1044</sup>

The park and the Air Force base cooperated in a number of areas. Airmen and reservists frequently were available to assist with park projects. In March 1965, demolition experts from the base helped park staff blast emergency alligator holes during a prolonged drought. From 1973 through 1981, members of the 915<sup>th</sup> Civil Engineering Squadron from the base conducted exercises in the park on weekends. Groups ranging in size from 10 to 60 servicemen built tent platforms, repaired boardwalks, and did electrical work. In April 1981, the 915<sup>th</sup> left Homestead Air Force Base, and another reserve unit, the 482<sup>nd</sup> Fighter Wing, moved in. Both units have made substantial contributions to park operations over the years. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Air Force stored equipment and supplies for an emergency hospital at park headquarters and the Pine Island utility area. In the 1950s, park rangers were active participants in the

<sup>1044</sup> Homestead Air Reserve Base website; U.S. Air Force, *Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, Disposal of Portions of Homestead Air Force Base* (Washington, D.C.: Air Force, Dec. 2000), 8; Mayr, 3-4.

Ground Observer Corps program. Rangers scanned the skies for approaching enemy aircraft, participating in drills and tests of the system.<sup>1045</sup>

There were some less-than-ideal aspects of the base's proximity. On March 13, 1958, a B-47 crashed just east of Pine Island, killing the four crewmen aboard. If the plane was carrying nuclear bombs, presumably they were recovered. In 1967, the park was contacting the Air Force about removing some target darts that had been dropped in the park. Overflights by military planes were by far the most vexing and persistent issue for park managers. These flights disturbed wildlife, degraded the visitor experience, and were incompatible with wilderness values.<sup>1046</sup>

## Military Overflights

Overflights became a more pressing issue with the arrival of the fighter wing at Homestead in the 1960s. The F-4 can fly at twice the speed of sound, creating sonic booms. The park began contacting the Air Force in 1967 about the noise from overflights. In 1968 the superintendent wrote the Homestead commander with a strong plea to end low-level flights and avoid certain areas entirely. He provided maps of major bird nesting areas and visitor concentrations he wanted avoided. It appears that low-level flights of B-52s over the park stopped for a period. Problems, especially with the fighter jets, continued. Air Force representatives repeatedly stated that pilots had instructions never to fly below 1,000 feet over the park, but pilots seem often to have ignored this regulation. In early 1970, the park believed the Air Force had committed to move low-level training routes away from the park, but agreed-upon changes were not implemented.<sup>1047</sup>

Overflights remained an on-and-off concern until July 1987, when the park learned that the Air Force was planning a military operations area (moa) over South Florida. The preferred alternative in the environmental impact statement placed the moa entirely over Everglades National Park and Big Cypress National Preserve. Projected operations included flights as low as 100 feet at high subsonic speeds of 400 to 500 miles per hour. The Air Force had not involved the NPS in any of the preliminary planning process. Superintendent Michael Finley enlisted the aid of environmental groups, 18 of which signed a letter of protest to the Secretary of the Air Force. In a fine turn of phrase, Finley also told the press that the plan was "tantamount to

1045 SMR, March 1965; Correspondence in Flamingo maintenance files, EVER-01814; SMR, Apr. 1965; Supt. Hamilton to RDR1, Mar. 30, 1962, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-69-5662; Air Force Historical Research Agency website, <http://www.afhra.af.mil/factsheets/factsheet.asp?id=10057>; Steve Hach, *The Cold War in South Florida* (Atlanta: NPS, 2004), 43-44. Hach's work provides the most comprehensive account of Cold War military activity in and near the four South Florida parks.

1046 SMR, Mar. 1958 and Apr. 1967.

1047 Background Paper, Military Overflights, Sep. 1998, EVER 56572.

proposing roller derby in the Sistine Chapel.” The Florida cabinet also weighed in against the proposal. In November 1988, the Air Force bowed to the pressure and announced it planned the moa for an area between Lake Okeechobee and I-75 (Alligator Alley).<sup>1048</sup>

From 1989 until August 1992, park staff continued to record low-level military operations over the park. A training route continued to take jets on their way to the Avon Park bombing range over parts of the park. Low-level helicopter missions using aircraft with blacked-out markings and refueling missions were observed at night. The Air Force provided little information, at one point telling park staff the observed exercises were classified. After Hurricane Andrew, Homestead AFB became a reserve installation, lessening the impact (see below).<sup>1049</sup>

## Testing Military Technology

The subtropical environment of Everglades National Park and its remoteness meant that the military and its contractors persistently wanted to test equipment there or use it as a monitoring station. Much of this work was secret and official records refer to it only elliptically or not at all. Flamingo was the site of quite a bit of activity from 1960 through 1963. Some of this involved the Army Signal Research and Development Laboratory and its contractor LORAC Services Corporation, which measured “magnetic currents” in the earth when nuclear tests were conducted in the Pacific. This involved the construction of a temporary 100-foot tower. Conductron Corporation was reported in the park in 1963 and 1964 doing a classified “study of electro-magnetic wave propagation through vegetation” under a contract with the Air Force. In 1967, the Army’s Aberdeen Proving Grounds got permission “to again conduct classified work” in the park. In winter 1969/1970, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology was doing electronics work for the Air Force on Long Pine Key “in direct support of Southeast Asia radar surveillance problems.” This required the erection of temporary towers.<sup>1050</sup> Park records from the 1950s and 1960s contain many tantalizing references to classified work. Many different units from all of the services were

1048 Background Paper, Military Overflights, Sep. 1998, EVER 56572; “Plan to Use Everglades for Fighter Training Opposed,” *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, Feb. 21, 1988; “State Cabinet Opposes Jet Training over Glades,” *Miami Herald*, Feb. 24, 1988; “Air Force Targets New Training Site,” *Tampa Tribune*, Nov. 2, 1988.

1049 Background Paper, Military Overflights, Sep. 1998, EVER 56572; Asst. Supt. to Supt., Apr. 7, 1989, EVER 58222.

1050 Acting Supt. to RDSE, Aug. 20, 1962, Supt. Joseph to RDSE, Nov. 27, 1963, Supt. Hamilton to the Director, May 16, 1963; SMR, Dec. 1966, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-70-A-4751; Charles W. Calahane, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, to Supt. Allin, Dec. 9, 1969, EVER 22965; SMR, Apr. 1963. The military also made extensive use of Dry Tortugas National Park. For example, the Everglades superintendent noted in April 1963 that the Air Force had placed “a mobile communications unit on Loggerhead Key on a temporary basis.”

involved in this work. Frequently, park files do not identify the unit, but merely note that the “U.S. Army” was operating in the park. This vagueness makes tracking down particular projects in military archives extremely difficult, even when the documents have been declassified. The full extent of the Cold War-related military activities in the park will probably never be known.

Perhaps the most interesting military research use of the park during the Cold War was the creation of a replica Viet Cong village on Palma Vista Hammock to test infrared sensing technology. The U.S. in 1964 had about 25,000 servicemen in South Vietnam supporting a government under attack by Viet Cong guerrillas, who were backed by a Communist North Vietnamese government. The Air Force hoped that infrared sensors in low-flying aircraft would help them target guerilla encampments in the jungles of Southeast Asia. The Air Force Avionics Laboratory contracted the testing to the HRB Singer Corporation, which began searching for a suitable testing location in South Florida. Singer concluded that Palma Vista Hammock had the needed vegetation cover, road access, and degree of security to conduct this classified work. The company informed Superintendent Stanley Joseph in summer 1964 that it would seek a special use permit for the testing.<sup>1051</sup>

The NPS initially denied the permit request, considering the proposed use contrary to park values, but the national defense argument proved too strong to resist and the work went forward in 1965. Singer constructed huts of poles and grass, foot bridges, and lean-tos and dug some earthworks and foxholes. It hired men from a local temporary-labor agency and had them simulate camp activities, including building wood and charcoal fires. Park rangers assisted the company and kept an eye on their activities. Aircraft, including DC-3s, made passes at night, flying at altitudes of 500 feet and lower. No copy of the special use permit has been located; presumably Singer was required to remove all traces of its activities at the hammock when the testing was concluded.<sup>1052</sup>

## **The Cuban Revolution Reverberates in South Florida**

The Cuban Revolution brought the Cold War home to many Americans and had a significant impact on Everglades National Park. An armed rebel group, led by Fidel Castro, began a campaign against the corrupt regime of Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista in 1953. The movement’s first recorded impact on the park came in March 1958, when rangers apprehended three armed Cubans along Shark Valley’s seven-mile

<sup>1051</sup> Supt. Joseph to RDSE, Sep. 2, 1964, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-69-5662.

<sup>1052</sup> Supt. Joseph to RDSE, Sept. 2, 1964, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-69-5662; Col. Edward B. Giller, USAF, to Dir. Hartzog, Nov. 11, 1964, NARA II, RG 79, NPS AF, box 584; SMR, Jan. and Oct. 1965, Feb. 1966.

road who said they were training to overthrow Batista. Castro's group assumed power in Havana on New Year's Day, 1959. Batista's repressive regime had largely benefitted wealthy Cubans at the expense of the average citizen, and Castro at first had widespread support on the island. As Castro moved to the left, nationalizing companies and acting against the interests of U.S. companies, the U.S. government cut off its aid. Castro began to jail or kill his domestic opponents and turned increasingly to the Soviet Union for backing. The overthrow of Castro became the unacknowledged policy of the U.S. government, and South Florida and the Everglades became a staging ground for anti-Castro activity.<sup>1053</sup>

An early impact of the Cuban Revolution on Everglades National Park was the landing of Cuban refugees. Park staff conferred regularly with the U.S. Border Patrol on the refugee situation starting in 1960. Tens of thousands of refugees arrived in South Florida and many started planning and training to overthrow Castro. Remote and minimally patrolled, the Everglades and Florida Bay became a hotbed of shadowy exile activity, often financed and led by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Keys within the park and remote inlets were used as rendezvous points, weapon caches, and training sites. Some of this activity made its way into official park records, but it is safe to assume that most of these clandestine operations were not recorded. By mid-1960, the U.S. government had in place a campaign of sabotage against the Castro government and was beginning to organize and train an invasion force of exiles. In February 1961, park rangers found eight Cubans engaged in target practice just off the Tamiami Trail in the park. They may have been an independent group or part of the CIA-supported invasion force that landed in the Bay of Pigs on Cuba's south coast on April 17, 1961. The Cuban Army was ready for the attack and all of the exiles ended up killed or captured. As security against future attacks, Castro drew closer to the Soviet Union, leading to the placement of Soviet missiles on the island and the event that became known as the Cuban Missile Crisis.<sup>1054</sup>

### **The Cuban Missile Crisis and its Aftermath**

Hoping to forestall future invasions following the Bay of Pigs, Castro was happy to accept a beefed-up Soviet military presence on the island. An American U-2 reconnaissance plane on October 14, 1962, detected the presence of Soviet intermediate-range missiles on Cuba. A threat of this magnitude so close to the mainland was unacceptable to the U.S. government. As tensions mounted, troops, planes, surface-to-air missiles, and other equipment poured into South Florida. President John

<sup>1053</sup> Hach, 13-16.

<sup>1054</sup> SMR, Sep. 1960, Feb. and Nov. 1961, June 1962; Hach, 16-21.

F. Kennedy on October 22 announced a blockade of Cuba and ordered the Navy to stop and board any suspicious ship heading to the island. The U.S. military operated at a high level of readiness and prepared to invade Cuba if the Soviets refused to remove the missiles. SAC sent its bombers to scattered sites around the country to make them less vulnerable to attack. It also implemented an airborne alert, with B-52s carrying nuclear bombs constantly in the air. In the park, plans for an emergency evacuation of personnel were hastily drawn up. On Oct. 25, a Soviet surface-to-air missile shot down a U-2 plane from the 4080<sup>th</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Wing over Cuba, killing its pilot. Negotiations ended the crisis before any further escalation. By October 27, the Soviets had agreed to dismantle the Cuban missile sites in return for a U.S. pledge not to invade the island in future. The U.S. also agreed to remove from Turkey some missiles aimed at the Soviet Union, in a side deal that was kept secret from the American people for several years.<sup>1055</sup>

The events of October 1962 had lasting effects on Everglades National Park, ranging from an increased emphasis on civil defense to the acceptance of a permanent military installation inside the park's authorized boundary. As described below, the base arose on property not yet owned by the NPS. The emergence of Cuba as a Soviet ally made South Florida even more of a target in the event of war, either one started by Castro on his own or as part of a coordinated eastern bloc offensive. The park prepared a "Nuclear Attack Survival Plan" that was distributed to all employees in February 1963. The plan was modeled on the park's hurricane warning plan, with color-coded alert levels. A red alert would be declared if a nuclear bomb had fallen in the Homestead-Miami area. The plan's authors noted helpfully, "This will be self-evident." Flamingo was designated as an evacuation center, and four staff members would establish a checkpoint at West Lake to administer a "radiological metering test" to all seeking refuge. Among other tasks, the district ranger was directed to "set up a fishing detail who will . . . begin the catching, cleaning and refrigerating of fish to augment other food supplies." In his cover memo, Superintendent Hamilton blandly asserted that if a nuclear attack occurred, "undoubtedly all park employees would take it in stride as each of you has done in past emergencies."<sup>1056</sup>

Surface-to-air missiles were an important part of the defenses of South Florida during and after the missile crisis. The area previously had not been part of the national air defense network, and the Army in October and November 1962 had to scramble to arrange temporary installations for Nike Hercules and HAWK surface-to-air missiles

1055 Hach, 21-23; SMR, Oct. 1962; J. C. Hopkins and Sheldon A. Goldberg, *The Development of the Strategic Air Command, 1946-1986* (Offutt AFB, Neb.: USAF, 1986), 107-109. On November 26, President Kennedy visited Homestead AFB and presented the Outstanding Unit Award to the 4080<sup>th</sup> Strategic Reconnaissance Wing in recognition of its reconnaissance missions over Cuba.

1056 Supt. to All Employees, Feb. 8, 1963, transmitting Nuclear Attack Survival Plan, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-69-5662.

(SAMs). The Nike Hercules was a two-stage, solid-fuel SAM primarily targeted against bombers but with some capability against ballistic missiles. The 41-foot-long missiles could carry both conventional and nuclear warheads. Nike-Hercules units were widely deployed around major U.S. population centers and military bases in the 1950s and 1960s. The HAWK was a medium-range SAM mounted on wheeled or tracked vehicles, making it semimobile. The missiles were 16-and- $\frac{1}{2}$ -feet long and carried conventional warheads. The Army set up four temporary Nike sites in Dade County in fall 1962. Battery C/2/52 went in near Carol City north of Miami, and Battery D/2/52 was located in north Dade County near the Broward County line. A third battery, A/2/52, set up shop on fields hastily leased from a farmer along State Route 27 just outside the park's main entrance. Upon its return from nuclear tests in the Pacific, Battery B/2/52 began operating near A/2/52. Headquarters for the batteries was established in Princeton, Florida. The army set up a number HAWK sites in and around Homestead Air Force Base and at Key West.<sup>1057</sup>

In early 1963, the Army decided to make its South Florida missile sites permanent. To keep down costs, the military looked for sites already in federal government ownership. The park first learned of this new direction in March when rangers encountered four military officers in civilian clothes in an unmarked car in the Hole-in-the-Donut scouting locations. The Army wanted to move Battery A/2/52 from its temporary location to a fixed site inside the park's boundary. Superintendent Warren Hamilton quickly notified the Southeast Regional Office and the matter soon had reached the highest NPS levels in Washington. The Service did not want this incompatible use within the park boundary, but the Army had an ace up its sleeve. The 700 acres that the Army needed were a part of the 4,400 acres that had come into Farmers Home Administration ownership when the Iori Farms tomato-growing operation went bankrupt (see chapter 6). The Defense Department threatened to block the transfer of this large tract to the NPS if it did not get the missile base. The Senate Committee on Interior and Insular Affairs told Interior, Agriculture, and Defense to work something out. As Interior put it to the National Parks Association, "We felt that we could not oppose the use of part of this land for a Nike site without raising serious questions concerning the national defense and at the same time jeopardizing enactment of legislation needed to acquire the greater portion for the park." The NPS ended up acquiescing in the issuance of a special use permit to the Army by the Farmers Home Administration, to which it became a party when the administration conveyed the land to the NPS. At this same period, the Army decided to permanently locate Battery B/2/52 on Key Largo, at a site designated as HM-40. The site became

1057 Hach, 75-76.

operational in 1965 and was decommissioned in June 1979. Most of that site is now part of the Crocodile Lake National Wildlife Refuge.<sup>1058</sup>

## Nike Base HM-69

The Army designated the new Nike Hercules installation in the park HM-69 (Homestead-Miami 69). Each such installation consisted of a launch area and a control area, ideally located about one mile from each other. The launch area contained missile shelter buildings, a missile assembly and test building, a ready building, kennels for guard dogs, and various utility and storage buildings. The high water table in the Everglades meant that missiles could not be kept underground as they were elsewhere, but had to be stored in above-ground shelters. Each of the three shelters at HM-69 was surrounded by a U-shaped earthen berm to contain blast effects. The control area had an administration/barracks building, a general warehouse, generator building, towers and antennae for radars, and miscellaneous support buildings (figure



**Figure 22-2. HM-69 radars**

22-2, HM-69 radars). HM-69 lay toward the end of Line Pine Key Road (now Research Road). By April 1964, the Army Corps of Engineers had begun construction of the site. Limestone for building pads was obtained on-site, leaving borrow pits that filled with water and became ponds. Park staff met frequently with Army personnel and contractors to coordinate construction activity and keep damage to a minimum. Florida Power & Light crews were in the park extending an above-ground power line to Long Pine Key and the missile base. During the construction period, servicemen from the temporary missile site outside the park gates helped fight fires in the park. By July 1965, Battery A/2/52 had completed its move to the permanent base. Staff at the base typically ranged from 125 to 150.<sup>1059</sup>

As historian Steve Hach has shown, duty at the South Florida missile bases had numerous drawbacks. Most of the sites were far from recreational opportunities, and the climate and mosquitoes could be brutal. After the initial excitement of deploying in the face of the enemy nearby in Cuba faded, tedium set in. As related above in

<sup>1058</sup> Supt. to RDSE, Mar. 22, 1963, Acting Asst. Dir. Jackson E. Price to Howard Bertsch, Farmers Home Administration, Apr. 8, 1964, Asst. SOI to Mr. and Mrs. David R. Rock, Aug. 3, 1964, NARA Ph, RG 79, 79-69-662; Acting Asst. Dir. Thomas F. Flynn Jr. to Anthony Wayne Smith, NPA, July 21, 1964, NARA II, RG 79, NPS AF, box 1627; Hach, 57. The National Parks Association complained of the Service's "meek attitude" in not more forcefully resisting the Nike base, *National Parks Magazine*, Sep. 1964, 18.

<sup>1059</sup> SMR, Apr. and Oct., 1964, May and July 1965; Drawing 160/60318A, NPS TIC.

chapter 21, park rangers had to deal with some infractions by soldiers. Other soldiers found more constructive use for their off-duty hours. Two at Battery A in the early 1970s built and launched working models of Army and NASA rockets. The servicemen also assisted with numerous construction and maintenance projects in the park. When the old Iori bunkhouse across the road from the HM-69 administration building became a Youth Conservation Corps (YCC) facility in 1973, the enrollees took their meals in the Army mess hall. HM-69 servicemen worked with and directed some of the YCC projects.<sup>1060</sup>

As the U.S. and the Soviet Union moved more and more of their nuclear arsenals to intercontinental ballistic missiles, the Nike Hercules program, focused mostly on bringing down bombers, lost its reason for existence. The South Florida bases were the last in the U.S. to be decommissioned. The Army decided in 1979 to deactivate HM-69 and it removed its missiles from the base in 1980. After a couple of years of indecision, the Army finally agreed in 1982 to relinquish its special use permit and proceeded to remove property from the site. Park managers were already using the missile shelters at the launch area for equipment storage during hurricane season. The park converted the administration building to offices for resource management staff in the 1980s with help from Air Force reserve units from Homestead AFB. Some smaller buildings were demolished and the borrow pit was filled in, after a number of servicemen's wrecked autos were removed from it.<sup>1061</sup> The presence of an active SAM base in the park for almost 15 years was something the NPS never sought, but was forced to accept. Because the 700 acres involved had already been rockplowed for agriculture, the subsequent use by the Army was probably less destructive than it might have been. The park has gotten good use from the administration building (now the Daniel Beard Center). The former missile shelters continue to be used for equipment storage in hurricane season and the base is now interpreted to the public.

The Nike site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places on July 27, 2004, at the national level of significance. On October 23<sup>rd</sup> of that year, the park held a ceremony commemorating the designation and unveiled a plaque on the wall of the Beard Center. As described in chapter 20, the park began interpretive tours of the Nike base in January 2009. A 2011 historic structure report for the site recommended preservation as the proposed treatment for the launch area and rehabilitation for the control area.<sup>1062</sup>

1060 Hach, 76-82; SMR, Aug. 1965, Dec. 1966, Jan. 1967; "Success Realized in Youth Conservation/U.S. Army at Everglades National Park," NPS media release, Aug. 30, 1973, EVER 58222.

1061 SAR, 1980 through 1983.

1062 "A New Mission for a Missile Base," *Miami Herald*, Oct. 23, 2004; Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., *HM-69 Nike Missile Site, Everglades National Park, Florida, Historic Structure Report* (Atlanta: NPS, Oct. 2011), 4.

Although the Cold War is over, the hostility between the U.S. and Cuban governments has not ended as of this writing. As related above in chapter 21, small groups of refugees still occasionally leave the island and end up being left in the park. The U.S. in 1985 began broadcasting to the people of Cuba over Radio Marti, with the stated purpose of providing “a contrast to Cuban media and provid[ing] its listeners with an uncensored view of current events.” The station’s transmitters are housed on blimp, known locally as Fat Albert, which is moored at Cudjoe Key. In January 1991, Fat Albert broke loose and landed in the park. Rangers helped retrieve its remains from the mangroves at Shark Point.<sup>1063</sup>

### **The Fate of Homestead Air Force Base**

The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) Commission in 1991 recommended that Homestead AFB be closed. In August 1992, Hurricane Andrew virtually destroyed the base, adding to the argument for closure. In July 1993, President Bill Clinton sent his list of military installations to be closed, including Homestead, to Congress, which approved it.<sup>1064</sup> The Air Force decided to retain 900 of the base’s 3,000 acres for use as an air reserve base. This left 1,632 acres available for reuse, with the understanding that other users would need to share the runway with the air reserve base. Approximately 500 acres were buffer or wetlands that could not be developed. No federal agency expressed an interest in the surplus land, but Miami-Dade County did. Under BRAC procedures, the county became the local redevelopment authority and had to come up with a community reuse plan. The county’s plan called for the surplus acreage to become a regional commercial airport (commuter aviation, private jets, and cargo planes) with associated businesses. As part of the redevelopment process, the county was required to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) to analyze the environmental consequences of the reuse plan and propose mitigation measures. In part because the Clinton administration had promised rapid action on making the base available for alternate uses, the EIS was completed in record time. On October 26, 1994, an Air Force record of decision approved the transfer of 1,632 acres to Miami-Dade County for use as a regional airport and associated activities.<sup>1065</sup>

<sup>1063</sup> Terry interview; “Crews Retrieve Transmitting Equipment Off TV Marti Blimp Stuck in Mangroves,” *Miami Herald*, Jan. 26, 1991.

<sup>1064</sup> The Base Realignment and Closure (BRAC) process was developed in the late 1980s to get around some of the intense political fights that typically accompany the decommissioning of military bases. A BRAC Commission was created that periodically comes up with a list of bases to be closed. The list then goes to the president. If he approves the list, it is sent to Congress. Congress cannot tinker with the list and must either accept it in toto or reject it.

<sup>1065</sup> Mayr, 14-16.

A commercial airport at Homestead clearly had serious potential impacts on Biscayne and Everglades National Parks. The NPS had been minimally consulted as the community reuse plan was developed, and it was soon apparent that the EIS had not adequately examined many questions, including groundwater runoff into Biscayne Bay and noise pollution from some 200,000 flights per year. Everglades managers were particularly concerned about the effects of jet noise on wildlife and visitors in a park that was overwhelmingly wilderness. In addition, the plan had been developed without public involvement and seemed to favor businessmen closely tied to county politicians. In July 1994, the Metro-Dade Commission gave a right of first refusal on the base redevelopment to Homestead Air Base Developers, Inc. (HABDI), without competitive bidding. Several HABDI principals were leaders of the Latin Builders Association, which for years had made campaign contributions to Metro-Dade Commission members, notably Miami Mayor Alex Penelas. HABDI unveiled its plans for the site in November 1994; they were much more extensive than previously revealed and included construction of a second runway.<sup>1066</sup>

The Biscayne, Everglades, and Big Cypress superintendents, national environmental groups, and many local residents demanded a more thorough examination of the environmental impacts of the proposed commercial airport. In fall 1996, Everglades Superintendent Richard Ring briefed Assistant Secretary of the Interior George Frampton about the threats to the South Florida parks. Politically, the issue was a delicate one. The county commission and important Latin business leaders promised that the commercial airport would bring thousands of jobs to South Dade County. Cuban Americans who supported business and jobs were an important voting group but so were environmentally oriented voters. Although there was considerable concern in the DOI and the EPA over the redevelopment plan, at this point it appeared to have support from the White House. It also had the strong backing of Senator Bob Graham and the Florida cabinet. At the January 1997 meeting of the Everglades Coalition, Katie McGinty, chair of the federal Council on Environmental Quality, announced that a supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) would be prepared. This first SEIS was limited in scope and recommended that a second SEIS, fully examining the impacts of a commercial airport, be prepared. The secretary of the Air Force signed a record of decision in February 1998 that required the second EIS.<sup>1067</sup>

The Air Force and the Federal Aviation Agency (FAA) were the lead agencies on the second SEIS, while the NPS, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the U.S. EPA were cooperating agencies. Representing the NPS on the SEIS team were Nat Wood

1066 Supt., Biscayne National Park, to RDSE, Sep. 12, 1994, EVER 56572; "Air Base's Hand-Over Is Delayed, Environmental Concerns Cited," *Miami Herald*, Jan. 17, 1997; Mayr, 17-26.

1067 Nathaniel P. Reed to Paul Tudor Jones, June 5, 1997, NPR papers; "First Phase Approved for Homestead Airport," *Miami Herald*, Mar. 25, 1998; Mayr, 55-62.

from WASO, William Schmidt, NPS expert on noise impacts, Karen Ferro, management assistant at Everglades, Wendy O'Sullivan and Pat Lynch, chief, natural resources and management assistant, respectively, from Biscayne National Park. William Leary and Don Jodrey from DOI also participated. Team meetings were often acrimonious, with FAA representative Ralph Thompson II at times "radiat[ing] contempt" for Bill Schmidt. The FAA refused to consider any modifications to its methods for noise analysis. Ferro reported to her superintendent, "I am concerned that this whole process gives the determination of impacts, including those on parklands, to the FAA. . . . [O]ur methodology is dismissed out of hand." The team produced four alternatives: a regional airport (the Dade/HABDI plan), a commercial spaceport, a wetlands project with an aquarium, and an ecologically sensitive resort complex. Although the SEIS concluded that the regional airport would have greater environmental impacts than any of the other alternatives, it concluded that the proposed alternative of a regional airport would have no significant impact on Everglades and Biscayne National Parks.<sup>1068</sup>

Most environmentalists expressed outrage at the SEIS's conclusions. More importantly, both Secretary Babbitt and EPA administrator Carol Browner publically opposed the regional commercial airport. Normally, a disagreement between Defense and Interior would be decided in the White House, but 2000 was an election year. The airport controversy presented a dilemma for Vice President Al Gore, who was running for president, in part on his record as an environmentalist. Florida was an important swing state in his contest with Texas Governor George W. Bush. Had the second SEIS come out against the regional airport, Gore would have had some political cover. As it was, he felt that any stance he took would alienate a key Florida constituency: Cuban Americans if he opposed Mayor Penelas's airport plan and the environmentally conscious if he supported it. Gore took the classic politician's course: he waffled. In advance of Florida's Democratic presidential primary in March 2000, Gore would only say, "I would urge the continued discussion of how a balanced solution can be found that can help the community without hurting the environment." In the words of *Miami Herald* columnist Carl Hiassen, "the environmental vice president has elected to wimp out." Gore remained noncommittal on the issue through the general election, providing an opening for Green Party candidate Ralph Nader. Joe Browder, whose role in the fight against the Big Cypress Jetport is covered in chapter 9, was among those who explained to Nader how he could use the redevelopment issue in his campaign. At rallies in Florida, Nader blasted Gore on the airport, specifically mentioning the consequences for the national parks. Bush ended up winning Florida by 537 votes.

1068 Mayr, 81-106, quotes at 83 and 90.

We will never know how many of Nader's 97,488 Florida votes would have gone to Gore had he taken a different airport stance.<sup>1069</sup>

In January 2001, after the U.S. Supreme Court had stopped the Florida recount and assured the election of George Bush, the Clinton administration announced a decision. As a result of negotiations between SOI Babbitt and Secretary of the Air Force Whitten Peters, the Air Force produced a record of decision that conveyed the surplus acreage to Miami-Dade County for a mixed-use development that excluded an airport. A key statement was: "The Air Force will not allow the environmental impacts of a commercial airport in this unique location when other viable alternatives for economic development and jobs exist." Miami-Dade County and HABDI took legal action against the decision, but the county dropped out as a plaintiff in December 2001 and the case was dismissed in March 2006.<sup>1070</sup> A 14-year fight thus came to an end with a result that seemed like the obvious solution to many all along.

1069 Carl Hiassen, "Green Al's Turning a Pale Shade of Yellow: A Veep Wimp-Out on the Airport Flap," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 27, 2000; "Nader Finds Allies in Fired-Up Crowd," *Miami Herald*, Nov. 5, 2000; Mayr, 102-111, 129-131; Atlas of U.S. Presidential Elections, <http://uselectionatlas.org/RESULTS/state.php?year=2000&fips=12&f=0&off=0&elect=0>; "Park Official Dislikes Homestead Airport Plan," *Miami Herald*, Dec. 31, 1999; Joe Browder, interview by Nancy Russell, Dec. 7, 2007.

1070 Second Supplemental Record of Decision, Disposal of Portions of Former Homestead AFB, Jan. 15, 2001, EVER 56572; "U.S. Bans Airport Near Everglades," *New York Times*, Jan. 17, 2001; "Miami-Dade Abandons Airport Plan," *Miami Herald*, Dec. 6, 2001; Mayr, 137-142.