

BAHAMAS PATROL

By Sam185

Whilst today's RN operations in the West Indies are predominantly centred on counter narcotics operations as Atlantic Patrol Task (North), the role of the 60's West Indies Guardship was more about the protection of British colonial interests.

The vast majority of countries in the region with that British interest had still not become Independent from Britain so a military presence was still required in a protective role for civil unrest, for hurricane relief and for other humanitarian operations.

In fact, there were 18 countries for the Guardship to visit and 'show the flag'. The majority are now independent from Britain (year of independence) however, six of them are still British Overseas Territories.

Anguilla (British Overseas Territory)
Antigua & Barbuda (1968)
Bahamas (1973)
Barbados (1966)
Bermuda (British Overseas Territory)
British Guiana (Guyana, 1966)
British Honduras (Belize, 1973)
British Virgin Islands (British Overseas Territory)
Cayman Islands (British Overseas Territory)
Dominica (1978)
Grenada (1974)
Jamaica (1962)
Montserrat (British Overseas Territory)
St Kitts & Nevis (1983)
St Lucia (1979)
St Vincent & Grenadines (1979)
Trinidad & Tobago (1962)
Turks & Caicos (British Overseas Territory)

However, besides 'showing the flag' the prime role of the West Indies Guardship, in conjunction with the US Coastguard and the Bahamian Police, was The Bahamas Patrol, specifically for countering Cuban insurgency operations in the Bahamas.

In addition to the ships' own small complement of Royal Marines, whilst on patrol there were always two or three Bahamian policemen onboard. Whilst frequent 'arrests' were indeed made, the RN ships on patrol rescued dozens, if not hundreds, of refugees in small, unseaworthy boats as they fled from the Communist oppression of Castro's Cuba.

The patrol ship was also supported by US Coastguard patrol aircraft and was frequently in and out of Freeport, Grand Bahama or the US Naval Base at Key West 'delivering' insurgents or refugees.

The actual patrol area was centred on Anguilla Cays which are pretty much in the centre of a triangle formed by Cuba to the south and west, Florida to the north and west, and the Bahamas to the east. These Cays were ideally situated, enabling the patrolling ship to run down any suspicious contacts reported by the air patrols. As the ship patrolled along the north coast of Cuba from Great Inagua in the south, across to Key West in the north-west and north-east to Nassau and Freeport, frequent stops were made to investigate the mainly uninhabited Cays.

Zoom in on the chart to find Anguilla Cays and see just how close Guinchos Cay is to Cuba...



Chart of The Bahamas

Cays or Keys are basically small islands of sand on coral and very few of them have any fresh water and so the smaller ones are generally uninhabited.

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