

I was vacationing in Europe with my family and I remember we were in Vienna and one evening when we returned to the hotel, I turned on CNN International and then saw the Coast Guard picking up the Cubans in boats and bringing them to Guantanamo and I said wow, "When I get back to Miami things are going to be really interesting. And I think I arrived Saturday back to Miami and on Sunday I got a phone call from the White House and they said, "We are thinking of establishing the unbootsen position in Guantanamo." My job in Guantanamo was not so much to help them adjust to life in the United States but to help them with humanitarian assistance and to improve the understanding and the communication between the government agencies, the military, the media, the relatives in Miami, to bring in whatever was needed there that was needed right away. That was my job.

My first encounter with the camps were thousands of people behind the fence yelling, some with children in their arms, "Please help us. We want to get out!" Things like that. "We need water." Whatever it is that they were saying.

We had a tour of the camps and I met with a group of leaders and one of them has a question. He says, "Mr. Diaz, do you think that we should have hope, (meaning hope to come to the United States) soon?" Of course, the policy of the United States was we do not know when, so I thought about it for a moment and I said, "I don't know if you should have hope (I said it in Spanish) but you should have faith.

In the camps for children when I arrived they were not given milk. I tried to get them milk and it was difficult because of logistics situation I was told etc, etc. So rather than making any fuss about it, and again, with my early thoughts on the matter, I talked to the commanding officer and I said, "alright, there is not milk here, but can I bring milk? If I get donations can I bring it over?" And he said, "Yea, of course. We have no objection to your doing that." So there were programs, marathons, for people to donate clothing and medicines and all that. There was a very generous family in Los Angeles that donated thousands of pounds of powdered milk. Department of Justice allowed me to charter a plane to bring donations and newspapers and things that they needed and little by little life started getting better. There were clinics set up. We managed to get permission for the Miami medical team to fly doctors and dentists and nurses every week and at their own expense. We had equipment and everything to Guantanamo to give attention not only to the Cubans but also to the Haitians who were interned at the base. Fortunately one day the news came, well, "we are going to allow the elderly and the infirm to leave in one flight," so I knew this was the window that had been opened and so we flew the first group to Miami.

I left with an internal content that the mission had been accomplished with a minimum of problems. It could have been - the possibilities of serious problems were there. They did not happen. So I was happy in that sense. I was happy that they finally came to the United States, most of them. There were a few thousand that were returned to Cuba because they were undesirables and rightly so but the vast majority came to the United States.