

You're an officer and you want to overthrow João Goulart, President of Brasil. An archipelago of regional conspiracies is already working on that since 1963, backed by powerful civilian forces. Goulart knew of his cutthroat political environment and hence coup-proofed by stacking the upper ranks, starting with his Minister of War, Jair Dantas Ribeiro, with reliable commanders - leftists, respected and professional officers, sycophants. This was not without its costs, as sending unreliable officers to remote garrisons or delaying their promotions in favor of those of lesser competence was unpopular.

Officers by default were politically amorphous and, in crises, didn't pick sides and prioritized their careers. But by both Goulart and the conspirators' actions this had changed. Below the trusted appointees, the lower officer ranks wouldn't resist a coup d'état against the Commander-in-Chief.

So how to topple Goulart? Taking the federal capital? That was Brasília since 1960, but it had Congress and nothing else. Its garrison was irrelevant. The federal administrative machinery, including the Ministry of War¹, was in Rio de Janeiro city, Guanabara state.² That garrison was massive. So rise it in revolt? Goulart had concentrated his reliable officers there, such as Âncora of the 1st Army and Oromar Osório of the 1st Infantry Division.

Instead, rebel a large state. Win over the governor as political support will be a prerequisite. Then invade Rio de Janeiro. Part of its 1st Army will move to fight back, but far from central oversight, its oppositionist medium ranks (Lt Colonel and below) will refuse to fight.

That leaves two, Minas Gerais and São Paulo. Which of them? Both. The governors, Magalhães Pinto and Ademar de Barros, were already oppositionist and expected a coup d'état would give them better odds in the 1965 presidential election. The 1st Army (São Paulo) and 4th Infantry Division³ (Minas) invade Rio and, in their rear area, Brasília.⁴

But São Paulo was worse as the launch pad. Ademar was politically erratic and did not want a repeat of 1932 - his state alone in civil war with the whole country. And general Amauri Kruehl, anti-communist and aware of the conspiracy, was still part of Goulart's coup-proofing, his friend and receiver of his aid in getting a new plantation and employing his son.

On the other hand, Minas had the highest political-military cohesion. Its geography allowed offensives into Guanabara and Brasília and defensible mountain terrain. Mourão was in Juiz de Fora, less than 150 km from Rio - São Paulo is at over double the distance. He'd previously conspired from Rio Grande do Sul at 1300 km away, in a state with 5 other divisions which he had to try to ally with. Later he rebuilt his conspiracy from the 2nd Military Region in São Paulo - under the 1st Army and distinct from the 2nd Infantry Division.⁵ Now the 4th Military Region and Infantry Division were the same command - he had total freedom.

The government knew he was up to no good. That was why he was in Minas Gerais, a low priority state, continental and far from the border, serving just as a source of resources. The garrison was under-equipped and very understrength, 4 or 5 thousand men, many of which only served a few months. Rio and Guanabara had 30 thousand men - 1st Infantry Division, Armored Division, Aero-terrestrial Division Core, School-Unit Group and more -, the Santa Cruz airbase and two battalions of marines.⁶

¹ The Navy and Air Force had their own ministries.

² Rio de Janeiro *state* was ruled from Niterói and encompassed everything but Rio *city*, which was the Federal District and later, until 1975, the state of Guanabara.

³ Part of the 1st Army.

⁴ The battle plan developed by Castelo Branco's team.

⁵ Military Regions are mostly administrative.

⁶ Until the 60s firepower was concentrated in Rio, as the capital, and the south, facing other Platine armies.

There was a way to square the circle. The governor didn't wield just political legitimacy. He commanded the *Polícia Militar*⁷ or *Força Pública*. Both state gendarmerie and auxiliary to the federal army, it was thus a state army, though it'd specialized away from this militia role.⁸ By reversing this process, it could be employed in the frontlines, compensating the state's military weakness. Thus for the past years Magalhães, fearful of a federal attack,⁹ had expanded the *PMMG* from 11,376 men in 1960 to 17,880 in 1964. Trained with Army help on mountainous defensive combat, they wielded rifles, mortars and ZB and Madsen LMGs.

Yet Minas was landlocked and the obvious outlet, Rio, was the enemy. The other piece in the puzzle was the negotiation of an alternative corridor - through Espírito Santo, through which there was already a railway to a port. Foreign armaments would flow in and the *PMMG* would defend the railway.¹⁰

Was this successful? The police didn't have enough weapons for its whole strength and was in effect light infantry only fit for urban combat. In a prolonged war, even if foreign armament could equip 50 thousand volunteers, together with 18 thousand police and 4 thousand Army servicemen they'd face 200 thousand federal troops.

For Mourão, the only chance was a surprise attack. With what he had in the city (infantry battalion, police battalion, howitzer group and mechanized recon squadron) he'd embark at night and by daybreak reach Guanabara. He'd overpower the 1st Tank Battalion on Avenida Brasil, dispatch a platoon to kidnap the President, seize the Ministry of War and move against the garrison (which he didn't even think would want to fight in the city), issuing a manifesto signed by the governors.

To think that nobody would notice the movement, that anyone would accept his declaration of power or that the garrison wouldn't crush him was ludicrous.¹¹ At least it was more inventive than the opposing concept, declaring a rebellion, defending the border and negotiating. In 1932 there was already a precedent of a force invading Rio, immediately dropping the opportunity to press forward, and getting defeated. All they'd end up negotiating would be surrender. But it was what Magalhães and Mourão's Divisional Infantry¹² general, Guedes, believed in. He thought his "little soldiers", young and barely trained, couldn't pull off an invasion. For Mourão it was the contrary, their psychology wouldn't stand a static defense.

In any case, their timing was off. When they were about to kick off their movement, on the 30th, Magalhães issued a manifesto to the press. He and Guedes were in the state capital, Belo Horizonte, far from the divisional HQ. Guedes informed his superior of the *fait accompli* and told his officers he was in rebellion. Mourão was *enraged*. They'd agreed he'd first receive a copy of the manifesto, move his troops and give the green light for the declaration. But now Magalhães and Guedes had stolen the trophy of starting the "revolution"¹³ and handed Mourão the hot potato of conducting it.

Their greed had a risk. They'd declare war first to mobilize later. What if the federal government took it seriously and the telephone call failed? Before Mourão could move the troops there'd be paratroopers in Belo Horizonte and the Armored Division in Juiz de Fora. And what if Mourão, still not in rebellion, chose to remain legalist? He'd crush them. Thankfully nobody noticed. The "manifesto" was some vague platitudes and didn't call for the President's removal. Writing it weak-worded, too, had been greed. And Guedes' "rebellion" was fictional. Not even the regimental commander in Belo Horizonte had been informed of it.

⁷ Not military police/provosts. In the federal Army those are the *Polícia do Exército* (Army Police).

⁸ A legacy of the decentralized Old Republic (1889-1930), when their role as militias was fully employed in internal conflicts, but downplayed since the Vargas era (1930-1945).

⁹ Early conspiracies were often defensive in nature, particularly by the governors.

¹⁰ Espírito Santo only had police of unknown fighting capacity and the 3rd Caçadores Battalion.

¹¹ Muricy's opinion. On Mourão's defense, the tank battalion's commander would be on his side.

¹² Brigade-level command, there was also Divisional Artillery. Later replaced with real brigades.

¹³ To this day pro-Guedes sources will say the coup began on the 30th.

Goulart and his generals didn't even notice what they should have - large and visible movements of men and supplies by the Minas police in the preceding days. They notably underemployed their intelligence services.

31st of March

It is the 31st of March, 17:00. Mourão finally speaks, calling for a successor to Goulart to be chosen by the legal process.¹⁴ The coup d'état had begun 12 hours before, when, wearing his pajamas and red silk robe, he headed to the telephone number and shot a number of calls.

Call by call word had reached Army Chief of Staff Castelo Branco. One of the most prestigious generals, he'd recently taken a central, uniting role in the conspiracy. Everyone in Rio was astounded at the time. The date would be the 2nd of April or later. Coupists in Minas anticipated it by surprise. Castelo, always cautious, phoned Guedes and Magalhães, begging them to retreat because it was too early. But it was too late for that.

Up to this point, nobody knew quite sure what was going on in Minas, only rumor. When federal authorities asked, they only got negatives. It was just "*preventive measures, to avoid agitations*". Why was fuel rationed? "*To not harm supply*". And the state's mobilization for prolonged war ran at full steam. Communications and roads were controlled, leftists and unionists arrested, thousands of volunteers recruited. Espírito Santo's loyalty was guaranteed.

The Belo Horizonte airbase had a new commander uninvolved in the conspiracy and the police prepared to besiege it but he joined in. Police battalions joined into the army or their own detachments in the capital or facing São Paulo (Southern), Brasília (Triângulo) and Espírito Santo (Eastern).

What had Mourão achieved? His "Tiradentes Detachment" had begun to arrive at the Rio/Minas border on the Paraibuna river. Its vanguard company had already occupied the bridge at 14:00. What was the extent of the coup? Minas Gerais, the village of Monte Serrat on the border. In Guanabara, Carlos Lacerda's oppositionist state government, since early on entrenched in his palace, and the Command and General Staff School (ECEME), which was trying to lay low. That was all, in 12 hours.

Where was the President? He stood behind Army Police, Presidential Guards and a tank platoon in Laranjeiras palace, just a few blocks from his enemy Lacerda in Guanabara palace. The defensive lines met; Lacerda's had actually been there earlier.

He had already missed a major opportunity when Castelo, failing to reverse a coup d'état in which he was a leading figure, went to work. On the Ministry of War, the Duque de Caxias Palace, nerve center of the legalist military. Past 15:00, the Mechanized Recon Regiment and 2nd Tank Battalion parked tanks in front. Presidential Guards and AA were in the courtyard. Army Police flooded the lower levels, in a standoff with Castelo's lightly armed ECEME escort. Yet Âncora, with the arrest order on his hands, only gave it at 18:00, two hours after Castelo had left, probably on purpose.

Goulart had a trump card in Rio - the "people's admiral", Aragão, commander of the Marine Corps.¹⁵ He deemed himself "absolute lord of Rio for two days". But while his marines guarded pro-government radios and a few other points, Lacerda's police swept up unionists. Their only failure was in breaking a meeting on a building in front of the Air Ministry; Air Force personnel and then marines expelled the police at 18:25.

The unionists could weigh in favor of legalism, and attempted a general strike. When it came, it went little beyond Rio, leaving the coupist territories intact, and preventing mobilization from the

¹⁴ He probably did want a continuation of the constitutional regime, but he didn't have a say on what came next.

¹⁵ A 1,66 m tall northeastern mulatto, uninhibited and politicized. Embarrassing for the other admirals, who had surnames such as Hasselmann, Rademaker, Greenhalgh and Heck.

suburbs to the center. It was a net *asset* to the coup. Instrumental in this result was communications failure, and that may be because Lacerda's police had already arrested others of their leaders on the previous day.

In 19:05 the American military attaché evaluated that "the revolution seems to be losing moment". Yet Mourão's declaration sends shockwaves through the country. The dominoes begin to fall. Goulart's apparent strength had been built on inertia.

Battle lines defined

At some point in the afternoon the federal government had acknowledged the rebellion in Minas and announced units of the 1st Army had been moved to quell it.¹⁶ Hence at 18:00 the Tiradentes Detachment was faced off by a contingent (variously called 5 platoons, 300 men, a company) of the 1st Caçadores (light infantry) Battalion, from Petrópolis, midway between Guanabara and the border. Lt Col Kerensky, a fully reliable officer, now defended the border with Minas, good defensive terrain between the Paraibuna Stone and Paraibuna river. Crucially, he was on the right (Rio) margin, with the rebels controlling the extremely thin bridge¹⁷ and a bridgehead on the village of Monte Serrat.

It was a frontline, MG nests and mortar positions, the armed strength of legalism and rebellion in front of each other. They faced off with no combat. Arriving in Juiz de Fora and heading to the frontline were the 11th Infantry (16:00 or 18:00) and the 2nd/12th Infantry (22:00, horribly late, had to be given collective weapons, food, money and fuel because Guedes and the regimental commander sent it completely unprepared).¹⁸ Behind Kerensky were forces of the 1st Infantry Division from Rio, which would arrive in the theater next day. General Cunha Melo, Divisional Infantry commander, would lead the legalists.

It was a field campaign. Mourão's rebels invaded Rio state from the north, Âncora's legalists move in reaction and they'll battle it out on a mountainous theater full of bottlenecks and river lines. It is clear the legalists will win. The rebels are outnumbered - 2,714 men and 193 vehicles against perhaps 5,000 legalists. All of the 1st Infantry Division's regiments have two battalions, while in the 4th that's only the 12nd, with the 10th and 11th only having one. Not to mention that Mourão had used everything he had while Âncora had entire Great Units (Armored, Aeroterrestrial, School) unused.

The 1st is the strongest Infantry Division. The 4th moved against it with ammunition for a few hours of combat and young soldiers with a few months of training, save for the 11th Infantry which is thus its best regiment. And the police battalions? They would melt away in open field combat. And what of the IIIrd Air Zone and its Santa Cruz airbase, both under reliable legalists, and the 4 Gloster Meteors they'd earmarked for the theater?¹⁹ The weather and terrain are bad, legalist pilots are few, but the long column of rebel vehicles on the road will run away if fired at from the air.

Meanwhile Carlos Lacerda was behind a multilayered defense centered on the 1st Independent Company and 2nd Battalion of his police, bolstered by more battalions and hundreds of volunteers further out. They stood behind garbage trucks or from apartment windows. Radio patrols monitored the city. He wasn't part of the conspiracy - involved in the downfall of two other Presidents and living under the 1st Army's power, he was too big of a target surrounded by too many guns.²⁰

¹⁶ Very strangely the Minister of War's official notice said he dismissed of their posts *Guedes* and *Mourão*, in that order - from lower to higher rank. No Minister of War would make such a mistake.

¹⁷ Explosives were ready to blow it off.

¹⁸ The rebel eastern flank was covered by a company of the 2nd Police sent at 12:30 to Além Paraíba. Muricy mentions the 5th Police being in the area.

¹⁹ Near Areal the base's commander did manage to fly an unarmed aircraft over the column, causing panic.

²⁰ In addition, governor Magalhães contested with him the position of their party's presidential candidate and hence withheld information.

He did know it existed, would break out in April and the legalists would initially control his state. Thus he was advised to shelter elsewhere, but instead chose the symbolic value of entrenching in his palace. His defense plan, prepared for since late 1963, became in the previous days an active preparation for a siege. This was a courageous decision.

But what siege? At 21-22:00 there was panic as a convoy of marines headed their way, but all they did was reinforce Laranjeiras. Admiral Aragão very much wanted to attack, and it'd be quite a triumph. Lacerda could hold out no more than two hours. On the other hand Aragão could be sabotaged by the officers. Âncora assured Lacerda he wouldn't be attacked, and interestingly according to the governor's security secretary the 1st Army's commander phoned Aragão and threatened to move the Mech Recon's tanks on the Ministry of War if he tried to invade the gubernatorial palace. Rumors of attack continued to circulate through the next day, always false.

What prevented Aragão was that he never received Goulart's green light.²¹ The IIIrd Air Zone wouldn't bomb the palace. No orders, lack of officer support, and it'd be terrorism. It wouldn't bomb the rebel invasion in the hinterland, either - no green light. And the legalist reaction on land only had orders to defend. Goulart, but also most of his side, was apathetic when he needed to act. And the Army was acephalous, devoid of the Minister of War's coordination. He was in the hospital, recovering from a surgery days earlier, scheduled, not an emergency, against Goulart's request that it be delayed. That might've been his way to not have to face either the President nor his peers.

Brigade general Muricy, Mourão's field commander, arrived in the field by 21:00. He'd come all the way from Rio in the morning. The officers didn't like it. If Mourão wanted to hand command to a lesser general, why not Guedes?²² But that was the point, he hated Guedes and his defensive plan and would rather promote a colonel to general than have him command.

Kerensky's battalion was tiny but Cunha Melo's entire force was overwhelming. How he'd defeat it? Politics. He had experience in internal conflicts and knew how in the first 48 hours everyone was free to pick their side. What he had to do was to draw defections from the enemy.

São Paulo enters the field

Politics were also important because, while Mourão and Âncora's field commanders faced off north of Guanabara, west of it general Kruel's IInd Army was undecided and could weigh into the balance of power, although it was weaker than either the 1st Army or the IIIrd Army to its south. Just to be sure, at 22:50 the Ministry of War ordered the 5th Military Region/Infantry Division, immediately south of São Paulo, to move the 5th Mech Recon Squadron to the border. They ignored the order, already planning to switch sides.

And whilst Kruel didn't decide, after 21:00 general Zerbini of the Divisional Infantry 2²³ rallied the Paraíba valley, gateway to Rio, to the legalist cause. He controlled the two regiments (5th and 6th) and sent them on recon *north*, to the Mantiqueira range at the Minas border, and *west*.²⁴ To the north Mourão's 4th Engineer Battalion was quiet.²⁵ West, the rest of the IInd Army could go rogue, and thus he was promised reinforcements from the School-Unit Group (GUEs), including tanks.

At 18:00 the São Paulo Industries Federation gave Kruel 1,2 million USD to join the coup.²⁶ What stalled him was the conflict between his hate of the left and his loyalty and friendship with the President. He thought he could have both, and at 23:00-midnight had frantic phone calls offering his

²¹ He did, however, enforce the censorship that was in place, occupying several sites of anti-government media.

²² He distrusted his Divisional Artillery commander, too.

²³ i.e. the 2nd Infantry Division's Divisional Infantry.

²⁴ Zerbini's testimony is vague on the nature of the movement but his response was that the regiments did recon and were in quarters. There is a mention on the *Oral History* that a regiment moved west.

²⁵ The PMMG's Southern detachment was reassigned to the capital. There really wasn't anything on the SP/Minas axis.

²⁶ According to an eyewitness testimony 50 years after the fact.

support in exchange for breaking with the left, dismissing radical ministers and suppressing unionists. Could Krueel destroy Mourão? There were officers ready to imprison him if he didn't join the coup and Mourão believed his legacy as the "revolutionary leader" in São Paulo would prevent the IInd Army from fighting him.

On the other hand if Goulart really broke with the "popular forces" and shifted his support base to the center and the military the game would change, so who knows. The choice was open and he received the same suggestion from several important people.²⁷ But he knew this would empty his power, and he had no interest in being a figurehead President.²⁸ To Krueel he said he'd first crush Mourão himself before further negotiation (hence, negotiating from a better position).

There was another option: radicalize, attack the press and the governors, mobilize the unions and his trusted officers. He didn't have the nerve to pursue it nor would accept bloodshed. Then, faced with Krueel's demands to abandon his allies, he responded: "*Put your troops on the street and betray me openly*".

And thus at midnight Krueel issued his coupist declaration. Notably it repeatedly mentioned the reds but not the President himself - he still kept the option open. The IInd Army enacted its battle plan to move against Guanabara from the west, led by general Bandeira of the 2nd Infantry Division. Curiously it had the option to advance only as far as Viúva Graça, at the entrance to the coastal plain, where he'd have his boot on the government's neck; this could fit into his political endgame.

The governor and Navy were on his side, but not the Air Force, and hence the police backed by armored and AA assets would besiege two airbases. The police and Army took over public order while the IInd Army, state government and industrialists mobilized their economic powerhouse for war. Through the 1st of April they'd do mostly what Minas did: enlist volunteers, control fuel and roads, arrest the internal enemy.

Muricy and Mourão were on the Paraibuna negotiating with Kerensky. Soon it seemed clear he was just buying time for the next legalist echelon, the 1st Infantry, to entrench at the Paraíba river to the south. Mourão gave him 2 hours to get out of the way and right in front of him ordered his artillery to, on his orders, shell the 1st Caçadores. The 2nd Company's commander later complained that with the shelter he had his own company would be hit, but they never intended to fire, it was just psychological.

Muricy prepared an offensive for daybreak: a salvo at the Paraibuna Stone would tell the 1st Caçadores to get out of the way and the 10th Infantry would charge, while the 11th Infantry reinforced by light tanks would swing around in the rear, coming from the east, and get south of the Paraíba in Três Rios, from where it could attack the 1st Caçadores from behind. I presume this wasn't so sound as the 1st Infantry would already have occupied the place by daybreak.

Meanwhile, after negotiations 2 of Kerensky's platoons defected by midnight, severely weakening his position which already was outnumbered. His other officers also wanted to defect. With an impossible position, he retreated to Serraria. Muricy suspended the offensive and just prepared to quickly press forward at daybreak.²⁹ The tide was turning.

Morning, 1st of April

At dawn on the 1st of April, the Tiradentes Detachment stayed in place. Lacerda had his energy and all but one telephone line cut off. To not overcharge the generators his air conditioning was shut down, adding to the ominous atmosphere of imminent attack. Most other military schools in Urca

²⁷ Including former President Kubitschek and his own Minister of War, who resigned in the morning with the refusal.

²⁸ Note how similar this was to the outcome of the 1961 crisis: attempted coup, he assumes office but with the parliamentary system making him powerless.

²⁹ Mourão returned to Juiz de Fora. Defections from the 1st Caçadores joined the 10th Infantry.

joined the ECEME's cause. Krueel's direct orders overrid Zerbini's authority³⁰ and the Paraíba valley's regiments joined the IInd Army's eastward march.

In Resende lies the Agulhas Negras Military Academy, a name even civilians know, as it forms the Army's fresh lieutenants. It was commanded by brigade general Médici, who'd been outside the conspiracy but immediately sympathized with the rebellion. He had to do something to gain credibility. And he just happened to be right in the middle of the path between the 2nd Infantry Division and the GUEs, which moved westward to fight it. Thus at 03:10 informed the cadets of his decision: rebel against the Ist Army and side with the IInd Army. The nearby 1st Armored Infantry Battalion sided with him. Morale was high; there were officers willing to cross the mountains into Minas just to get an opportunity to fight.

The Tiradentes Detachment and IInd Army invade Rio state, Cunha Melo's forces and the GUEs move against them. The government controls Guanabara. The day begins with the coup pressing forward.

After 05:00 the 1st Infantry meets the Tiradentes Detachment ...to defect to it,³¹ becoming its last echelon, receiving rest and fuel. They advance to Serraria. Kerensky had already retreated to Petrópolis but some of his forces were left behind. Some officers were convinced to defect, others taken prisoner. The 1st Caçadores was gone. Muricy praised the refusals for their straight-faced loyalty, even though they were the enemy.

On the other hand Lt Col Raimundo Nonato, who followed Col Raimundo with his 2nd/1st Howitzer Regiment, refused to hand it. Muricy was serious: this is war, I can't let you off or you'll give away information. Through double-facedness Nonato allowed his 6th battery to escape, but the 4th Battery was swallowed into the rebel force and he himself was imprisoned.³²

After 07:00 the rebellion in Rio extended to the Copacabana Fort, right next to the Coastal Artillery HQ. They just lived with each other with no hostility. It was a placid, farcical rebellion. The HQ was reinforced with a battery from the Duque de Caxias Fort and 100 men from the 8th Motorized Coastal Artillery Group, still legalist, but somehow an officer from the HQ sent the latter away.

At 09:30³³ the bulk of Médici's cadets move east of Resende and occupy the Dutra (Rio-SP) highway before Barra Mansa. In the city fuel has been requisitioned, professors control the media and the mayor is imprisoned. The 1st Armored Infantry Battalion is tied down in neighboring Volta Redonda suppressing labor unrest.³⁴

If the 1st Infantry didn't want to defect, Muricy would face a strong defensive line on the Paraíba river.³⁵ It did, and the Tiradentes Detachment crossed it unguarded at 10:30. The Armored Division now had battalions - 2nd Tank (Valença) and 1st Armored Infantry (Barra Mansa) - to the west, in

³⁰ At 01:00 he phoned the 5th and heard everyone had got on trucks and left, leaving their quarters empty. He sent a motorized patrol to find out but never got any news from them. At 06:00 the 6th Infantry informed him they were marching east.

³¹ Allegedly the work of Marshal Denys' through a telephone call, but before the call Raimundo had already decided to defect and his oppositionist stance was known days earlier. This makes Denys' contribution irrelevant. He makes other claims, such as telling Muricy to advance -but Muricy claimed he'd already agreed that with the staff- or sending written appeals to the 1st Caçadores, triggering their defection - the frontline account is of a legalist lieutenant having a chat right there.

³² There was no 5th. Nonato told Muricy he'd discuss with his officers and return, then ordered the retreat. The 6th retreated all the way to quarters, meeting on its way the 1st/1st Howitzer coming on the other way and the citizens of Petrópolis, who mistook it for triumphant rebels.

³³ Médici had his staff draft the plans since 17:30 on the 31st.

³⁴ Volta Redonda's massive steelworks were vital to the military-technocratic national defense strategy.

³⁵ It seems Kerensky was "successful" as even after his retreat the rebels spent hours in place and that was enough time for the 1st Infantry to reach the river. As it defected all of that was void. This is my own conclusion based on the timetable.

the direction of the IIInd Army's theater. The 1st Armored Infantry was actually on his side, yes, but Muricy could only see the “fog of war” and accordingly dispatched the 2nd Police and an antitank battalion to the west. And Cunha Melo had the 2nd Infantry to the south, having spent the morning in Areal. The next battle was about to play out.

The President flees

At 12:30 an ECEME team has violently seized the Coastal Artillery HQ, with one wounded on each side. Not the Fort, which was already rebelled, and apparently even had the HQ under control, making the effort pointless and maybe even friendly fire. But it was caught on tape and televised, acquiring outsized fame.

Something far more critical took place at 12:30 - Goulart left for the airport to take off for Brasília after hearing a number of bad news. Krueel and the 1st Infantry had turned against him. America would recognize a paralell government, and, not quite to his knowledge, was ready to provide logistical support to the coupists and a naval taskforce had already set sail.³⁶

Coupists in the navy (admiral Heck) at some point attempted to acquire two submarines but found one was missing crew and another, parts. What they did succeed in was admiral Fairbairn's group immobilizing Arago's marines. Hence Âncora told him his remaining muscle, the Army Police and Presidential Guards, couldn't ensure his safety in the city.

Two almost battles

Rio's garrison was still in quarters, under legalist control. Attempts to persuade units failed, and forceful takeovers were deemed too risky. The next climax has to take place in the hinterland.

The Tiradentes Detachment was just south of Três Rios. Cunha Melo had every intention to resist and entrenched the 2nd Infantry and 1st/1st Howitzer north of Areal.³⁷ It was a frontline again. I'd raise two questions here: why didn't he reach the Paraíba river? It seems possible from the timetables. Did he trust the 1st Infantry too much? And, now that it couldn't be the river, why didn't he defend in the bottleneck between Areal and Petrópolis, which is much narrower? Perhaps he didn't want to cede ground.

Cunha Melo's objective was defensive, not just from lack of offensive orders, but also because the 1st Infantry's defection had changed the balance of power. Muricy considered he was now of equal or greater strength but still not ready for a regular open field battle. By noon he prepared an attack with the 11th Infantry and his group of howitzers. They'd get ahead of the column in a wider formation and charge enemy lines ASAP, even with a disorganized attack. The point was to strike fast to take advantage of the enemy not having much time to entrench. In the process they'd also get defections.

One source on the legalist perspective believed the 1st Group's 18 howitzers would've been brutal on a rebel attack, whether it'd succeed is not known. Cunha Melo didn't pick the best position but other sources still state it was excellent defensive terrain.

Meanwhile the 5th Infantry had arrived near Resende at 11:30, and other elements of the IIInd Army followed.³⁸ On the other side, at 13:00 came the GUEs vanguard, a battalion of the REsI (Infantry-School Regiment), its organic tank company and the 2nd battery of the GEsA (Artillery-School Group). More were coming in the road. Under brigade general Anfrísio, who stayed legalist, the

³⁶ A land intervention would require 60 thousand men (there were 16 in Vietnam at the time) and would be the most extreme option. The brass did, however, question the point of even a taskforce for gunboat diplomacy.

³⁷ The 3rd Infantry's situation isn't clear but at the very least they were en route to the front.

³⁸ Zerbini was taken into the Academy and forbidden to leave. Bandeira improperly employed his mech recon squadron, keeping it behind. It wasn't the greatest of armies. The most forward battery of the 2nd Howitzer Regiment came on requisitioned trucks. On half of them, beneath the canvas “DANGER - AMMUNITION” there was camping material.

GUEs served to show officers what proper units should look like, and thus had the highest standard of training and equipment, the latter American-sourced. It was the elite.

In between were Médict's cadets. A motorized cavalry squadron would fight a delaying action and retreat to a reinforced infantry company. An artillery battery would give them coverage. An engineer platoon would detonate the highway bridges, forcing the enemy into the awful outlying roads. The forces were at most a few km away. It was a war zone.

In conventional military logic, the cadets were doomed. They were 250 infantry and 80 cavalry, well-motivated but clueless, against 800 crack infantrymen. The two other batteries of the GEsA came with 35,000 shells, while Médict's had 250, no radios and no training on the vertical fire they'd have to use on the hilly terrain - and that's not something the cadets could just improvise on the field.

This is why Krueel had suggested Médict he'd mount a defense with his most forward forces, the 1st Armored Infantry and the Academy's Command and Service Battalion, which had a company of guards. He refused. The cadets had to be at the front, but not to fight. They were a human shield that nobody would want to shoot at. It was psychological.

Defection and sabotage

Cpt Ustra's AA battery was on its way to reinforce the GUEs.³⁹ And on its way. And at 20:00 it was still on its way, because he sabotaged transit. They'd arranged his battery's equipment with the politically reliable personnel of another, underequipped, battery, and an older captain that would overthrow him midway. With protest he managed to get his own soldiers and corporals back, and with them maintained control and delayed movement. This is an example of the political struggle that took place within units, and a demonstration of the degree of legalist morale.

The GEsA's 1st and 3rd batteries arrived at 14:00. Notably they, like the 2nd/1st Howitzer, had been kept isolated and uninformed by command. Only they learned, dumbfounded at the very idea, they'd fight cadets. Col Aldo insisted - "*it's a bitter mission*". Instead, the two batteries got on the road at full speed to defect. Thus they turned their backs to the REsI battalion and 2nd battery, with which they didn't coordinate, but those didn't mow them down as they could have - they hadn't the slightest loyalty to the government, either.

As this defecting group got on the road at full speed, Cpt Sanches saw Col Aldo coming his way and ordered the telephone line cut. Aldo saw the defecting convoy and, beside the road, tears in his eyes, shouted "Traitors! Traitors". He pulled his gun to commit suicide but Maj Simon held his arm.⁴⁰ Likewise a REsI mortar platoon, ordered to point at cadet positions, refused the order.

Legalist collapse

There was no combat because Âncora decided to negotiate with Krueel at the Academy. After the President flew away the legalist apparatus in Rio was hollow. Goulart had ordered him not to shed blood, and Costa e Silva, the other army general as influential in the conspiracy as Castelo, phoned him to make the suggestion. At 15:00 a ceasefire entered effect.

Near Areal, between 13-14:00, a staff officer was sent back to Três Rios to address a delay in the food trains. Now Muricy learned of major developments -Goulart had left Rio de Janeiro and Âncora was to negotiate with Krueel. The following hours were a dialogue between opposing commanders through emissaries.

³⁹ The pieces were meant for point defense, taking hours to deploy; asphalt would ruin the tractors' treads. Not that it stopped command from using it to guard a column on the highway.

⁴⁰ The story has exciting further details, such as telling the sergeants it was a "different recon" so they wouldn't complain, and later almost dying to friendly fire due to insufficient communication among the cadets.

-M: I'm preparing to attack. Verify if the Âncora-Kruel summit is true and prevent unnecessary bloodshed.

-CM: I have no knowledge. I won't fire first but will fulfill my mission to defend.

-M: And I'll fulfill my mission to move to Rio de Janeiro. I attack in one hour.

Cunha Melo then confirmed the summit with his superiors and was told to do whatever he wanted. Then at 14:30:

-CM: I'll let you pass with no resistance, if 1) you don't occupy the fuel refineries, 2) don't enter Petrópolis (there were two routes, through the city center and through the outskirts) to not demoralize Kerensky and 3) don't immediately advance to make it seem a chase/rout.

-M: I need fuel and want to deprive you of it. I will decompose my column and will send part of it through the city center. I move in two hours, get out.

And Cunha Melo lost. The battle was over. In Resende the old, asthmatic Âncora was embarrassed at the full honors with which he was received, saying a loser was entitled to none. To Médici, "*there are no losers except the fatherland's enemies*". Enemy or not, he was vanquished. When Zerbini begged him for a command to continue the legalist cause, he told him there wasn't even a government to fight for anymore. There was, but he got a point across. At 18:00 Kruel arrived and Âncora surrendered the 1st Army.

The surrender was negotiated at the frontline. Within Rio there's no watershed moment at which the government loses power. But it did in the afternoon onwards. The empty Laranjeiras palace was abandoned by its guards, the tanks famously joining Lacerda's defenders. Castelo and Costa e Silva left their hideouts, the latter assuming the empty Ministry of War and proclaiming himself "Supreme Commander of the Revolution". The Tiradentes Detachment marched in at the beginning of the 2nd of April.

Conclusion

This concludes how the coup d'état conquered Rio de Janeiro. There is more to it - his brief stay in Brasília, also invaded from two directions, the IVth Army's sideshow in the northeast and the large southern theater, where the legalists even achieved a handful of victories and Goulart lasted into morning on the 2nd. After flying to his estates his final destination was exile in Uruguay. That can be the subject of another article, together with several other topics.

Goulart's decisionmaking in the coup was marked by three refusals: to become a figurehead, to radicalize his power or to shed blood. Hence he refused to truly mobilize his base or to build another in the center. Inaction was all he had. Volunteers who showed to his cause were left without orders. His vast military resources were underemployed, missing opportunities such as attacking Lacerda or using the Air Force on the Tiradentes Detachment.

Even then on paper Âncora wielded much stronger forces than Mourão or Kruel. The "field battles" that took place had no shots fired. The entire coup cost 7 lives. Legalist forces simply melted away in contact, whereas Mourão had few problems in his division and Kruel mostly just had Zerbini's resistance. The swiftness of "battle" resolution lies in the mood in the officer corps. The way it went and having denied the two other options as well as even the dysfunctional defense that could be attempted, Goulart was left with retreat and exile.