Winter 1988

Operation Bumpy Road: The Role of Admiral Arleigh Burke and the U.S. Navy in the Bay of Pigs Invasion

John P. Madden
Old Dominion University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/history_etds

Part of the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
Madden, John P. "Operation Bumpy Road: The Role of Admiral Arleigh Burke and the U.S. Navy in the Bay of Pigs Invasion" (1988). Master of Arts (MA), thesis, History, Old Dominion University, DOI: 10.25777/chem-m407
https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/history_etds/35

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the History at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in History Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@odu.edu.
ABSTRACT

OPERATION BUMPY ROAD
THE ROLE OF ADMIRAL ARLEIGH BURKE AND THE U.S. NAVY
IN THE BAY OF PIGS INVASION

John P. Madden
Old Dominion University
Director: Dr. Willard C. Frank, Jr.

The Bay of Pigs invasion in April 1961 was a political and military fiasco. President John F. Kennedy inherited the plan when he took office in January 1961. Even though there was a low probability of success, Kennedy still approved the operation. Because of the failure at the Bay of Pigs Kennedy lost faith in the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] and the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS]. Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations [CNO], endorsed the need to eliminate Fidel Castro. The role of the CIA is a well-worn subject, but what was the role of Admiral Burke and the U.S. Navy in the Bay of Pigs operation? This review is an historical perspective of the role of Burke and the Navy in the planning and execution of the Bay of Pigs invasion. It shows that Burke and the Navy did what they could to make a poor plan work, but it was not enough. The key failure was that it was a civilian-run operation without sufficient military support and involvement.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .......................................... iii
INTRODUCTION .................................................. 1

Chapter
1. FRIEND OR FOE: THE RISE OF FIDEL CASTRO ........... 8
2. 17 MARCH 1960: THE WHEELS TURN ...................... 29
3. A POOR PLAN POORLY EXECUTED ......................... 67
4. PROFILE IN TIMIDITY OR WEAKNESS IN STRENGTH? .... 116

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY ................................. 130
BIBLIOGRAPHY ............................................... 135
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study could not have been completed without the invaluable assistance of the staff of the Naval Historical Center in the Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. G. Wesley Pryce, III, Dr. Theresa Krause, Dr. Jeffrey Barlow, and Bernard Calvalcante rendered countless hours helping me in my research and interviews. Susan Sweeney at the Naval Institute in Annapolis was a veritable phone directory in my endless quests for interviews. Their patience and toleration was greatly appreciated.

My search for the "holy grail" of unclassified material was assisted by Suzanne Forbes, at the John F. Kennedy Library, in Boston, Massachusetts. Her assistance in providing the library's resources and invaluable bibliography reduced the sweat hunting for material.

My deepest appreciation is given to Captain Lionel Krisel, USN (Ret), in Long Beach, California, who tolerated countless phone calls of mine verifying my information. Without his helpful guidance this paper would have several holes in it and I would not have had the opportunity to meet and interview Admiral Arleigh Burke, whom I have come to admire as a true American hero and a kind, gentle man.
I must not avoid citing the dedicated assistance provided by a member of my staff, Danilo "Pag" Pagtalunan. "Pag" patiently walked me through my tiresome efforts at trying to learn how to use a word processor. He even provided able assistance in countless spelling checks.

I would like to thank Professor Willard C. Frank, Jr., my advisor at Old Dominion University for his confidence and spirit in support of my project.

And finally, my wife Julia. Without her patient loving support I would not have put the pen to the paper. She complimented and criticized as necessary. But, most importantly, she tolerated my extremes: impatience, laziness, and ill temper. She would make a fine editor.
INTRODUCTION

"Operation Bumpy Road" was the code name for the United States Navy's role in the Bay of Pigs operation. The Bay of Pigs operation was originally intended to be a covert operation to invade Cuba and topple the Castro regime using Cuban exiles sponsored by the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA]. American military participation was to be kept at a minimum to avoid linking the United States to the operation. Presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy went so far as to direct the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS] to stay out of the actual conduct of the operation. Yet, the United States Navy still expected to be called on to provide support if needed and did become involved in the operation and rescue. For those involved in the operation it became a "bumpy road" to follow. Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations [CNO], and Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, [CINCLANT], foresaw the need for prior naval preparation in the event that American forces were directed to provide coastal protection of the operation, land troops on the beach, or conduct rescue missions.

Admiral Burke and the United States Navy wanted the Bay of Pigs operation to succeed. Because the Navy
supported the decision to remove Fidel Castro from power, naval decisions were made and actions were taken to help make the operation succeed. Even after receiving specific presidential directives to limit their involvement, the Navy did what it could to make the plan work, but it was not enough.

This study provides a historical perspective describing the fall of Fulgencio Batista and subsequent rise of Fidel Castro. It traces the rise of Castro and the Eisenhower Administration's reaction to the new threat in Cuba. It explains the thoughts and reasons behind the decisions made by senior administration officials. It describes the administration's reactions when it became obvious that Castro was developing closer ties with the communists. The shift in relations between Cuba and the Soviet Union was a major factor in the development of the Bay of Pigs operation. Eisenhower felt that it was necessary for a plan to be created by the CIA, using no overt American military force to oust Castro from power. Although Eisenhower's directions were clear, the CIA was not in a position to draft a plan without assistance from the military. Military guidance was necessary to make the plan work. The failure to bring the JCS and Navy into the plan at its earliest stages created a lack of military expertise in the developmental stages of the operation.

Admiral Burke, a naval hero dating to the Solomon
Islands campaign during World War II, was the most outspoken member of the JCS. He was deeply interested in the rise of Castro because of Cuba's strategic importance and the security of the American naval base at Guantanamo Bay. The Navy used Guantanamo as a site for ships to receive "refresher training." The training tested the crews in wartime conditions. Damage control, engineering casualty control, command and control, seamanship, and gunnery drills were conducted on a daily basis. A small detachment of American naval personnel was assigned to Guantanamo to provide the training and logistical support for the fleet. But, most important, Guantanamo remained a key strategic link to Cuba for the U.S. Navy. Guantanamo Bay was a deep draft port capable of handling ships from frigates to aircraft carriers. The base compound included a shipyard and refueling facility. Guantanamo was a vast naval complex capable of posing a serious threat to Castro's regime if the U.S. decided to use it for the launching-point of an invasion.

This study provides an explanation of the role Admiral Burke and the JCS played in reviewing the various plans offered by the CIA. Were Admiral Burke and the Navy active participants or passive bystanders? This study shows that Admiral Burke and the Navy were opposed to the Castro regime because of the strategic implications of a Soviet ally so close to the United States. The Navy saw a need to remove
Castro from power in order to alleviate strategic planning problems in the event of war with the Soviet Union.

The CIA conducted the operation only after the plan had been modified so many times that it did not resemble the original idea submitted to the JCS for their review. This study demonstrates that indecision in Washington because of political uncertainties forced modifications that almost guaranteed the plan's failure. The JCS, acting on directions from the White House, could only review and make recommendations. At the fleet level Admiral Dennison did what he could to make the operation succeed, but it was not enough. With his hands tied by presidential directives, Dennison could not commit his total forces to make the plan work. The breakdown in the relationship between the President and the military and the subsequent refusal to use military force in support of the revolutionaries were the crucial reasons for the failure of the operation. The Administration's failure to establish a realistic and clearly attainable objective forced the military into a "no-win" situation. As a result, the operation failed miserably and the Navy was asked to conduct the evacuation of the remaining forces from the beach.

The deteriorating relationship between Cuba and the United States is well documented but very little has been written of the Navy's role in the Bay of Pigs Operation. Narratives such as Mario Lazo's, Dagger in the Heart:

To date, very few Navy people involved in the operation have been willing to discuss or release


information concerning the Bay of Pigs. Some openly state that they don't want to talk about the operation. There is little written material that has been declassified describing the naval involvement in the invasion. The defeat at the Bay of Pigs was a "black eye" for many naval personnel. Admiral Arleigh Burke, as CNO, was responsible for keeping the Chairman of the JCS and the President informed of the naval problems associated with the operation. Burke has been criticized by historians for failing to keep Kennedy informed of the perils of the planning and execution of the assault. Records concerning Burke and the Navy's role remain quite sensitive. The Navy is still unwilling to declassify most of the information concerning the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Following the operation Kennedy asked General Maxwell Taylor, former Army Chief of Staff, to come out of retirement to chair a committee to look into the reasons for the failure at the Bay of Pigs. The resulting Taylor Committee Report gives a detailed description of the operation and some of the views of the participants. The third, and most recently declassified, section goes into great detail explaining the Navy's role through JCS messages and directives.

The references, though limited, show that Admiral Burke and the Navy did what they could to make a poor plan work. The Bay of Pigs operation was a military operation...
developed and conducted by civilians with little assistance from the military. Unfortunately, governmental limitations did not allow the military to assist in such a way as to let the plan succeed. The invasion failed miserably and the CIA and the JCS were held accountable.
CHAPTER ONE

FRIEND OR FOE: THE RISE OF FIDEL CASTRO

On 1 January 1959, Fulgencio Batista, President of Cuba, was ousted from power by Fidel Castro. The Batista regime created several problems for American foreign policy makers. Batista was a totalitarian dictator. Many in the United States felt that it was necessary to remove Batista from power if a democratic society was going to exist in Cuba. Fidel Castro was seen as the new blood that would implement radical changes to restore democracy in a country torn by civil strife.¹

In the United States the rise of Castro was accepted with guarded optimism and wary skepticism. Since the early days of 1953 his struggle to power was carefully observed in Washington. On 26 July 1953 Castro and a small group of his followers attacked the Moncado Barracks in Santiago. The unsuccessful attempt to force the removal of Batista was the foundation of the "26th of July Movement." Castro returned

from exile in Mexico in a highly publicized landing in Oriente province in 1956. Castro's revolution was based on agrarian reform throughout the countryside of Cuba. Castro stressed programs intended to aid the oppressed and impoverished, which simultaneously reduced the dominance and influence of big businesses in Cuba. These programs included granting land to small planters and peasants, with compensation to land owners, a more equitable share of the cane crop to planters, profit-sharing, confiscation of all illegally attained property, agricultural cooperatives to share equipment, cold storage, and the creation of a uniform direction in cultivation and breeding. Most alarming, though, Castro encouraged the nationalization of major corporations such as the electric and telephone companies.2

Castro and his followers hid in the Sierra Maestra jungles and conducted intermittent guerrilla operations against Batista strongholds. In addition to striking out against Batista, Castro rallied popular support for his revolution from the lower class workers and peasants. His promises of popular agrarian reform provided hope for the people. The numbers of communists within his movement grew as the Cuban populace rejected the harsh and corrupt Batista rule.

2FRUS, 866n.
The Eisenhower Administration was split. The Batista government was corrupt and had strong ties to American businesses, such as the United Fruit Company, the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation, Esso, and Texaco. If Castro came to power there was uncertainty concerning which direction he was going to lead Cuba. Castro appeared to be anti-communist, yet, he accepted communists within his inner circle of advisers. His brother, Raul, and Ernesto "Che" Guevara, his closest adviser, were confirmed communists. Some in the State Department saw Castro as an evil necessary to remove Batista from power. Others in the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], like Director Allen Dulles, and Deputy Director Richard Bissell, Admiral Arleigh Burke of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS], and Vice President Richard M. Nixon, were convinced that Castro would move quickly into the communist camp once he consolidated his power base within Cuba.3

While Castro's movements were cautiously observed by administration officials, Batista remained a thorn in the side of policy makers. Executions of his political opponents were common. Although his tactics were brutal, Batista was an ally of the United States. The United States tolerated Batista's abuses of power because he supported American interests in Cuba and abroad. Following Batista's

assumption of power in 1952, Cuba broke relations with the Soviet Union, outlawed the communist party, supported the United Nations' efforts in Korea, and was a major supporter of the CIA-sponsored overthrow of Guatemalan strongman Jacobo Arbenz in 1954. Despite his support of the United States, Batista's dictatorial regime fomented discontent throughout Cuba. As popular uprisings spread, Batista's stranglehold of Cuba became more oppressive. Insurrection was rampant. The Eisenhower Administration was in a quandary on how to handle the Cuban situation.

Principal opposition groups in Cuba included Fidel Castro's "26th of July Movement," the Sánchez Arango organization, the Revolutionary Directorate Federation, and university students under José Antonio Echevarría. Fidel Castro's movement was the primary opposition group capable of providing a substantial threat to Batista. In October 1956, the American embassy in Havana warned the State Department that popular uprisings and insurrections were probable by the start of the year. Political murders continued with alarming frequency. The government blamed its opposition. The opposition cited the murders as examples of the government's use of the police and military to brutally oppress civil liberties throughout Cuba.


5 FRUS, 835-37.
Senior government officials in Washington sent conflicting signals to Havana. The U.S. government objected to Batista's thuggery but turned its back while American military goods continued to be shipped to Havana. In January 1957 the American embassy in Havana recommended that the U.S. officially protest Batista's use of brute force in squelching opposition and civil rights. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles frowned upon Batista's use of murder and intimidation, but refrained from getting directly involved. On 16 February 1957 Dulles brushed aside recommendations that the U.S. protest, because he did not want to be accused of meddling in the affairs of another nation. Dulles encouraged the use of diplomacy, discretion, and sound judgment to deal with Batista. The failure of the administration to control Batista's use of American-supplied weaponry against the populace had crucial consequences in later dealings with the Castro regime.

Anti-Batista sentiment in Cuba grew in the summer of 1957. Memorandums and telegrams from the embassy in Havana repeated earlier warnings of growing popular dissent and harsher government reprisals. In September 1957 Ambassador Earl T. Smith notified the Secretary of State that Batista used American-supplied F-47s and B-26s to put down the revolt at Cienfuegos. Some of the equipment was provided

---

6Ibid., 840-41n.
through the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement, signed in March 1952. One of the stipulations in this agreement was that the weapons could not be used by a government to suppress internal unrest. Again, the response of the United States was to tread softly and defer decisions on future arms shipments to Batista. 

By late 1957 anti-Batista tensions were acute. The Eisenhower Administration began discussing possible alternatives to Batista. American short and long-term interests in Cuba were threatened by continued support of the Batista regime. Opposition grew day by day and if the government fell there would be chaos, anarchy, and a great deal of uncertainty. U.S. diplomats had to prepare contingencies for the possible fall of Batista. Cuban political uncertainty made the atmosphere ripe for civil unrest. On 21 November 1957 the State Department recommended three possible courses of action in dealing with the Cuban situation. The first option called for the U.S. to remain aloof and allow the "chips to fall." In this instance unrest would be allowed to grow and Batista would have to fend for himself. The second option consisted of a total embargo of military goods to Batista if he failed to stop the brutality and oppression. The third option consisted of taking a firm stand in dealings with anti-

---

7Ibid., 845.
Batista elements in the U.S. and Cuba. If the U.S. showed interest in the opposition groups, anti-American hostilities might be avoided if one of those groups came to power.\(^8\)

Publicly, the Eisenhower Administration opted to follow the charter of the Organization of American States [OAS] which prohibited the intervention of one country in the internal affairs of another. At times, Ambassador Smith favored conciliatory measures towards Batista because Americans had millions of dollars invested in Cuba. If American interests were to be protected, the U.S. had to support anti-communist efforts in Cuba.\(^9\) By the summer of 1958 support for Batista in Cuba waned. Privately, the administration began seeking a successor favorable to American interests. Castro received more support from the Cuban population than did any other opposition leader. Batista continued to receive support from the upper class and the military. The middle class slowly moved towards Castro's movement. Some of Eisenhower's advisers urged him to continue supporting Batista. Other advisers advocated that the rise of Castro was imminent. Still others favored neither Batista nor Castro, but rather one of the other

\(^8\)Ibid., 865.

opposition groups. Eisenhower was caught in a no-win situation. If he continued to support Batista, he would be branded as tolerating the brutal measures imposed by Batista. If he followed the advice of some of his advisers and opted for Castro, he would be open to charges of letting down an ally.

Little by little Batista's regime crumbled. In December 1958 Castro's forces launched an attack against Santa Clara in Las Villas province in eastern Cuba. As Castro's forces grew to significant numbers, it became more difficult for the Batista forces to put down the revolutionary movement. Government forces surrendered to Castro in vast numbers. The mutiny of the military was a stepping stone to the eventual fall of Batista. He was about to lose the last bastion of support within Cuba.

On 31 December 1958, the imminent fall of Batista was discussed in the office of the Secretary of State, Christian Herter. In attendance were the Secretary of State, Allen Dulles, Director of the CIA, Roy R. Rubottom, Jr., Deputy Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs, William

10 Eisenhower, 521.
11 Ibid., 520.
12 The information concerning this meeting was drawn from notes written by Admiral Burke based on his personal recollection. These uncatalogued notes are part of the Admiral Arleigh Burke Papers, Naval Historical Center, Washington Navy Yard, Washington, D.C. Hereafter cited as "Burke notes."
Wieland, in charge of the Cuba desk at the State Department, Robert Murphy, Deputy Secretary of State, and Admiral Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). Rubottom opened the meeting by stating that Batista had lost control and was willing to leave Cuba. Rubottom stressed that it was essential for the United States to force Batista out of office if he delayed any further, and he concluded that the U.S. should take advantage of the rise of Castro by trying to establish good relations with him. Admiral Burke opposed allowing Castro to assume power. The Batista government was ruthless and not ideal, but at least Batista maintained good relations with the U.S. Burke, therefore, recommended putting a group of men in power alongside Batista. Their job would be to make sure that Batista continue to protect American interests. This group of leaders would manage the country while ensuring that Batista still appeared to remain in control. Burke claimed that the U.S. was in a position to force Batista to accept Washington's directions because without American support he would fall from power.13

Admiral Burke was one of the earliest opponents of Castro. During his tour as CNO, the Office of Naval Intelligence kept a close eye on the progress of the movement. There was no doubt in Burke's mind that Castro was a communist. Castro's ultimate objective, like that of

13 Burke notes, 3-11.
other dictators, would be the never-ending quest for power. Burke questioned Castro's intent and character:

A man like Castro is a brilliant man. [He] disdains advice from his people. He doesn't have much respect for anybody or anything . . . including his own people. He was powerful and he could make decisions. He was wise, usually, and he made good decisions. But he was arrogant. The danger of an arrogant man is that 99 percent of his decisions will be correct. [When wrong] he will be so damn wrong that he will ruin the country.14

Castro's actions in the Sierra Maestra mountains worried Burke. Communists in Castro's inner circle of advisers fueled Burke's suspicions. In 1958 Castro's forces kidnapped naval personnel from the naval base at Guantanamo Bay and held them hostage in the Sierra Maestra mountains. Burke knew where the hostages were being kept. He was prepared to send in Marines to rescue the hostages as soon as he received the authorization.15 Castro's frequent attacks against Batista strongholds near the U.S. naval base at Guantanamo Bay concerned Burke. In the summer of 1958 Burke, in cooperation with the Cuban government, sent in U.S. marines to protect the water pumping stations along the Yateras River, which provided fresh water to the Guantanamo

14Admiral Arleigh Burke, USN (Ret), interview by author, tape recording, Fairfax, Virginia, 23 February 1988.

15Admiral Arleigh Burke, USN (Ret), interviewed by author, tape recording, Fairfax, Virginia, 16 September 1988.
Burke was concerned that the rise of Castro would provide a foothold in the Caribbean to the Soviets and threaten the security of the naval base at Guantanamo. In the future the Navy would have a greater stake to lose if Cuba fell into the hands of the communists.

Few in the meeting accepted Burke's warnings, and he was overruled by the State Department officials. Rubottom and Wieland argued that the Cuban people would not allow Castro to fall into the hands of the communists. They explained that it was natural for a revolutionary like Castro to include various elements of the opposition within the movement. By diversifying his movement, Castro created the necessary foundation to generate popular support for his causes.17

Dulles and Murphy supported Burke during the meeting on New Year's Eve. Secretary of State Herter did not commit himself. Those in attendance conceded to the State Department's argument that there was no other viable choice to replace Batista. Burke continued to argue that it was a major responsibility of the U.S. to have Cubans in power who were friendly to American interests. Burke claimed that American interests were best served by supporting these people. Again, Burke was refuted because such American

16Eisenhower, 520.

17Burke notes, 13-17.
actions were in violation of the OAS charter forbidding meddling in the affairs of another country. Burke was adamant that Castro would follow the communist line and Cuba would eventually become another China. Dulles supported Burke's claims that there was communist infiltration in Castro's movement but removed his objections when no hard evidence could be submitted. Only Burke and Murphy remained in opposition to Castro. After a lengthy argument they agreed with the others.\footnote{Ibid.}

Burke had several misgivings about the policy established in the meeting on New Year's Eve in the office of the Secretary of State. Burke questioned the influence of Wieland on Rubottom. Burke claimed that Rubottom was too lax in his examination of Wieland's proposals. Rubottom read the material and heard the briefings on the Cuban situation and convinced himself that Castro was a non-threat. Burke considered that people like Rubottom, other government officials, and the American press failed to accept the potential danger because it was not an imminent threat to immediate American interests. Many in the U.S. felt that Castro was the liberator of the oppressed in Cuba and would establish a democratic society. Administration officials ignored Burke's warnings that Castro was establishing the foundation of a communist power center.
while consolidating his power base.  

The following day, New Year's Day, 1 January 1959, the issue of selecting a replacement for Batista became moot, for on that morning the dictator fled to exile in the Dominican Republic. Fidel Castro and his supporters seized power. The New York Times hailed the rise of Castro in its 2 January 1959 editorial:

One . . . thing must be said and this is an acknowledgement to the extraordinary young man, Fidel Castro, who fought against such heavy odds with such tenacity, bravery, and intelligence since his pathetically weak band of youths landed in Oriente Province on December 2, 1956. A great burden now falls on his shoulders, and a task harder in its way than the struggle for liberty that has now ended. The American people will wish him and all Cubans good fortune.

Castro's initial actions showed promise for a transition to a democratic society. Carlos Manuel Urrutia Llea and Dr. José Míro Cardona, two respected Cuban businessmen, were appointed Provisional President and Premier, respectively. The Eisenhower Administration showed good faith by quickly recognizing the new government.

By the end of January the relationship between the Castro regime and the Eisenhower Administration soured. Castro repeatedly attacked the U.S. Army, Navy, and Air

---

19Ibid.


21Eisenhower, 522.
Force missions in Cuba because they had sponsored the training and support that Batista's forces received during the revolution. Speaking in Caracas, Venezuela, Castro was extremely critical of U.S. policy and its protection of "onerous American capital" in Cuba. In February Castro appeared on Cuban television blasting the United States for historically oppressing Cuba. Premier Cardona resigned as a result of his opposition to the direction the Castro movement was taking. Following Cardona's resignation Castro appointed himself Premier and stated that it was the responsibility of the United States to better Cuban-American relations. Castro stressed that the United States had to purchase more Cuban sugar. Although Castro expected the United States to pump more American dollars into the Cuban sugar industry, he also claimed that Cuba was no longer dependent on the United States and would establish relations with any nation it chooses, especially the Soviet Union and China.22

It became increasingly obvious to the Eisenhower Administration that Castro was moving further away from a position of cooperation with the United States. Threats of Cuban nationalization of American-owned businesses grew along with Castro's biting anti-American rhetoric. In March 1959 Cuba seized control of the Cuban Telephone Company, an

affiliate of the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation. In April 1959 Raúl Castro claimed that the United States was an "enemy of the revolution." Later, in June 1959, Guevara travelled to Egypt and India for the purpose of aligning Cuba with other neutral nations. During the trip Guevara continually made speeches denouncing the United States for its historic oppression of the Cuban people and continued imperialistic intentions as exhibited by the American naval presence at the Guantanamo Naval Base.²³

Fear grew throughout Latin America of the possible spread of Castro's revolution. In his January visit to Venezuela Castro asked President Romulo Betancourt to support his efforts to "liberate" Puerto Rico from the grasp of the United States. Castro failed to win the support of Betancourt. Castro later blasted both Venezuela and Costa Rica for failing to support his opposition to the American presence in the Caribbean.²⁴ Cuban-sponsored insurrection surfaced throughout the region after Castro failed to receive support from other Latin American leaders. Revolutionaries sponsored by Cuba launched unsuccessful

²³Ibid., 73.
²⁴Higgins, 43.
invasions in Panama, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti.\textsuperscript{25}

Washington grew concerned about Castro's obvious leanings toward communism. Following the recognition of the communist party in Cuba, Castro sent Guevara to Moscow as Cuba's representative to the 21st Congress of the Soviet Communist Party. While in Moscow Guevara credited the communists in Cuba with ousting Batista and continuing the fight against American interference in Cuban affairs. In February Castro denounced the United States and reported that Cuba would not side with the United States in its confrontation with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. In that same month Castro postponed promised elections until 1961. In a briefing at the White House on 26 March 1959, Allen Dulles warned Eisenhower that Cuba was evolving into a communist state under the leadership of Castro. The communists did not control the government, but their influence in the military, labor unions, and police forces grew.\textsuperscript{26}

In April 1959 Castro visited the United States to speak to the United Nations. Eisenhower originally considered denying Castro a visa but was advised against that course of action. But the President adamantly refused

\textsuperscript{25}"Two Years of Castro," \textit{Office of Naval Intelligence Review} 16, no. 2 (February 1961): 73.

\textsuperscript{26}Eisenhower, 522-23.
to see Castro. Instead, he directed Vice President Nixon to see him. The result was a three-hour conversation which convinced Nixon that Castro was a communist. In a briefing given to Eisenhower following his conversation with Castro, Nixon stated, "[Castro] looked like a revolutionary, talked like an idealistic college professor and reacted like a communist." Nixon concluded, "Castro is either incredibly naive about communism or is under communist discipline."²⁷ As a result of his conversation with Castro, Nixon was one of the first advocates of training Cuban guerrillas in exile towards the ultimate goal of ousting Castro.²⁸

Castro continued his anti-American rhetoric and consolidation of power through the use of intimidation and executions into early 1960. The Eisenhower Administration grew more perturbed with the Cuban situation. Particularly bothersome were Castro's continual attacks towards the United States while it continued to subsidize Cuban goods. Following his seizure of power Castro's depleted treasury received an advance of $15 million in subsidies from American oil companies. Even with United States government support and oil company subsidies, Castro nationalized


The problem of coping with the nationalization of American-owned businesses plagued the Eisenhower Administration. Eisenhower was in a diplomatic and political dilemma. It was difficult to tolerate American interests being trampled by Castro, but stiff policies might push Cuba closer, if not into, the Soviet Union’s open arms. If American actions were viewed as too stringent by some Latin American leaders Eisenhower might jeopardize years of good will. In order to maintain solid Latin American support for the United States' policies in the region, he decided to maintain a policy of toleration towards Castro. In January 1960, though, in a show of growing weariness of Cuba, Washington recalled Ambassador Phillip Bonsal from Havana for consultations. Eisenhower did not wish to break ties with Cuba. He stressed the need to work within the framework of the OAS to isolate Cuba. If Castro failed to cooperate, Eisenhower favored a multilateral blockade of Cuba coordinated by the OAS. The pressure of a blockade, he hoped, would turn the populace against Castro or force him to work with the OAS. The intent would be to "starve" the population into getting rid of Castro.  

30 Higgins, 48.
American corporations with interests in Cuba fueled the fire for stiffer economic measures against Castro. After being pressured by Secretary of the Treasury Robert Anderson, several American-owned petroleum refineries refused to refine 300,000 barrels of Soviet crude oil. In response, the Cuban government directed Esso, Texaco, and Shell to provide plans for the refining of the Soviet oil or risk Cuban take-over. On 29 June 1960, following the petroleum companies' refusal to refine the Soviet oil, the Cuban government seized the Texaco refinery and two barges of Soviet oil were pulled into the refinery. The Esso and Shell refineries were seized the next day by members of the Cuban worker's militia. In retaliation, Secretary of State Herter urged the House Committee on Agriculture to revoke the sugar quota. On 5 July 1960 Congress approved the measure granting the President the power to cut the sugar quota. Eisenhower signed the bill the next day. The quota called for the cutting of 700,000 tons in 1960. Further cuts reduced the sugar quota entirely by 1961.

Without any more stringent measures, Eisenhower's options were limited. The Soviet Union and other eastern-bloc nations supplanted the cutback of American economic

---


subsidies to Cuba. Cordial economic relations between the 
Soviet Union and Cuba had been established in February 1960.
In a visit to Havana Soviet Deputy Premier Anasatias I.
Mikoyan signed an agreement calling for the normalization of 
relations between the two countries. In addition, the 
Soviet Union agreed to a trade and credit deal and also 
agreed to furnish Soviet technicians. After the Soviet-
Cuban trade agreement was signed, Czechoslovakia established 
a $60 million line of credit for the purchase of jet
aircraft, tanks, anti-aircraft artillery, and small arms.33
In May 1960 the first Soviet advisers arrived in Havana.
Further Cuban dealings with other communist nations included 
the exchange of students with China. Castro's direct
involvement with communist-bloc nations aggravated an
already sensitive American position towards Cuba.34

Castro's growing dominance proved that something more
stringent than economic measures was necessary. It was
difficult, though, for Eisenhower to rally American support
against Castro because he posed no truly imminent threat to
American interests. As Castro's ties to Moscow grew, it was
evident to the President that "something had to be done."35

33 "Two Years of Castro," Office of Naval Intelligence
Review 16, no. 2 (February 1961): 80.
34 "Two Years of Castro," Office of Naval Intelligence
35 Eisenhower, 524-25.
The random executions of Castro's opposition, the nationalization of American-owned businesses, and finally, the emergence of the Soviet Union as a major Cuban ally forced Washington to reassess its policies towards Cuba. A political and strategic threat slowly emerging ninety miles off the southern coast of the United States.
CHAPTER TWO

17 MARCH 1960: THE WHEELS TURN

Clandestine operations in the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] had a way of running on their own during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations with little outside interference. The CIA was constantly involved in non-stop, secret wars against perceived communist forces. Since 1948 the CIA had kept leftist forces throughout the world off-balance on more than one occasion. The CIA's operations in Greece in 1948, the Philippines in 1952-1953, Iran in 1953, and Guatemala in 1954 were successful and kept American involvement low keyed. The agency had experience and the requisite knowledge to conduct successful operations. The Cuban situation provided the CIA with a sizable challenge.¹

The "5412 Committee" was established as an adjunct to the National Security Council to discuss CIA covert operations and other intelligence matters which affected national security. The committee consisted of the Deputy Undersecretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of the CIA, and the National Security Adviser.

Its mission was to review, discuss, and approve the CIA's covert plans. On 17 March 1960, the "5412 Committee" met with the President, members of the White-House Staff, State Department, and Joint Chiefs of Staff [JCS] in the White House. In attendance were Vice President Nixon, Secretary of State Herter, Undersecretary of State Douglas Dillon, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Livingston Merchant, Roy Rubottom, John Irwin, Admiral Burke, Deputy Director of the CIA Richard Bissell, Secretary of the Treasury Anderson, and General Andrew Goodpaster.2 The discussions concerned the various measures available to the President to handle the Cuban situation. The general consensus of the meeting was that the situation had gotten out of hand. Eisenhower felt particularly perturbed that a communist regime so close to the United States was "thumbs its nose" at the United States.3 Castro had become an oppressive dictator under the influence of the Soviet Union and China. There was no chance of democracy emerging in Cuba so long as Castro remained in power. Individual freedoms needed to be restored and Sino-Soviet influence

---


eliminated. A realistic agrarian reform program needed to be established. With Castro in power oppression would continue, but most important, the United States was faced with a strategic and political dilemma as Soviet influence in the region grew.

At the conclusion of the meeting Eisenhower directed Dulles and the CIA to develop a plan to replace the Castro regime with one more "devoted to the true interests of the Cuban people" and more acceptable to the interests of the United States. No overt American involvement was allowed. Eisenhower authorized support and direction for rebels inside and outside Cuba. The President approved four courses of action:

1. Creation of an exile group opposed to Castro,
2. Development of a means to spread propaganda throughout Cuba,
3. Creation of a covert intelligence network inside Cuba,

The fourth course of action consisted of two phases. The first phase consisted of recruiting and training leaders of the movement. These leaders would be trained as paramilitary instructors. The second phase consisted of the

---

4Dwight D. Eisenhower, Personal Papers, Post Presidential Series, Palm Desert, California, Cuba file, box 10, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas
rebel paramilitary leaders training other Cuban exiles for eventual insertion into Cuba to conduct guerrilla operations against the Castro regime.⁵

Eisenhower wanted an operation similar to the one conducted in Guatemala in 1954. On 18 June 1954 two hundred revolutionaries sponsored by the CIA crossed the Honduran border into Guatemala. These troops received air cover from three P-47 fighter planes and a pair of Cessnas. During the "invasion" a radio barrage of propaganda was broadcast from Swan Island in the Caribbean. The CIA hoped that there would be a general uprising against the Arbenz regime during the invasion. The light bombing throughout Guatemala, coupled with jamming of local radio stations and misleading information broadcast from Swan Island, finally provoked a revolt within the Guatemalan military against the government. Arbenz was deposed and Castillo Armas, supported by the CIA, was installed in power.⁶ The planner of the Guatemalan operation, Richard Bissell, felt that the probability of success in Cuba was dependent on Castro falling to the same kind of pressure put on Arbenz. Bissell


based his strategy on "a protracted period of psychological and political warfare." Bissell didn't think that Castro would resist:

The chance of true success—that is the chance of toppling Castro—was predicated on the assumption that, faced with that kind of pressure, he would suffer the same loss of nerve [as Arbenz].

Eisenhower approved the development of a plan to topple Castro in March 1960. The plan called for the training of twenty guerrilla leaders. Training sites were established at the U.S. Army Jungle Warfare School at Fort Gulick in the Panama Canal Zone. The other training location was at Retalheu, Guatemala. The guerrilla leaders were to receive training in tactics, infiltration, methods of strengthening and "knitting up" the suppose active guerrilla resistance in Cuba. After initial training this group were to train seventy-five other exiles with an ultimate objective of three hundred additional recruits. The final aspects of training were to prepare the guerrillas for eventual infiltration into Cuba and building a network of guerrilla resistance with logistical support from the United States.

---


On 18 August 1960 Bissell briefed the President on the status of the operation. A communications site consisting of a 50 kilowatt radio station was established on Swan Island in the central Caribbean. It began broadcasting on 18 May 1960. Bissell advised Eisenhower that training was progressing but additional funds and Department of Defense [DoD] support was needed. Eisenhower approved a budget increase of $13 million as well as the use of DoD personnel and equipment for training in Guatemala. Eisenhower stressed that no U.S. troops would be used in a combat status.9

The JCS were informed of the plan well after the wheels started turning. The JCS and Navy were intentionally left out of the planning and development phases in order to protect the security of the operation. The CIA went ahead with the training in Central America, arranged the purchase of antiquated World War II amphibious landing craft and ships (LCIs and LSDs), and recruited additional exiles to conduct the mission. Even though DoD personnel and equipment were brought into operation as early as August 1960, the JCS never officially received briefings on the operation until October. General Lyman Lemnitzer, USA, Chairman of the JCS, was briefed on the plan only after the President asked Dulles to give a briefing on the status of

9Taylor Report, Part I, Memorandum 1, p. 2.
the Cuban operation during a White House meeting. Admiral Burke and Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Jr., Commander in Chief, Atlantic, [CINCLANT], gained information of the operation through Naval Intelligence sources in Guatemala and Nicaragua. In its initial phases neither the JCS nor the Navy received a detailed briefing of the operation. They were not allowed to participate in the planning or logistical coordination of the plan. It was a CIA matter. Security was paramount. The JCS could not discuss the operation with anyone, not even their immediate staffs.10 As the operation grew, the security issue would become a greater burden for the Navy in its attempts to prepare for any contingencies that might require the use of American naval forces to assist in the conduct of the mission.

By late October 1960 problems continued to grow in the operation and the CIA was forced to change plans. Scheduled commitments were not met because the CIA encountered difficulty creating a unified opposition to Castro. Swan Island sporadically broadcast propaganda. To compound matters the underground in Cuba was overrated and unorganized. Security was so lax that it was fairly easy for Castro to round up suspected guerrillas. Castro isolated remaining guerrillas in the Escambray Mountains and

10 Jeffrey Graham Barlow, "President John F. Kennedy and His Joint Chiefs of Staff" (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1981), 180-86.
literally starved them out. On 31 October the CIA recommended that the scope of the operation be changed because of the growing problems. In a cable from CIA Headquarters in Washington to the Senior Project Representative in Retalheu the CIA alerted its agents that changes in the operation were forthcoming. In the change proposed to the White House the CIA recommended that the operation shift from guerrilla infiltrations to a conventional amphibious landing and airborne assault. Consequently the emphasis in training shifted from guerrilla warfare and infiltration tactics to conventional assault consisting of squad, platoon, and company regimented training. The cable to Retalheu concluded that a possibility existed that the revolutionary forces would receive U.S. Army special forces training and support. On 4 November Eisenhower authorized changing the format of the operation to a conventional assault. The size of the revolutionary force grew from the original 20 guerrilla leaders to approximately 600 to 750 exiles in training. The operation now included a preliminary air strike launched from Nicaragua to wipe out Castro's air force and other military targets. After the amphibious landing, air strikes and logistical flights to the beachhead would continue. The invading force would have to secure the beachhead, maintain

a visible presence, and then draw a sizable number of dissidents from the military and civilian populace for support of the landing force. These defections would trigger a popular uprising against the Castro regime.\textsuperscript{12} Following the uprising a provisional government made up of Cuban exiles recruited by the CIA would be established on the beachhead.

A major decision to shift the nature of the operation from guerrilla infiltrations to full scale amphibious landings should have been reviewed and if necessary modified by the nation's military chiefs. All review and modifications continued to be made by the CIA alone with no outside assistance. In order to ease training and coordination with the military, the JCS temporarily assigned Marine Corps Colonels Jack Hawkins and Stanley Beerli to coordinate the military training of the ground and air forces. If the CIA had interpreted this as an indication of a joint CIA-JCS cooperation, it was in error.\textsuperscript{13} The Joint Chiefs' action was taken to assist another government agency conduct an operation, not to take part in it.

The small-scale guerrilla assault force escalated by December 1960 into a full-scale amphibious landing force consisting of the Cuban Expeditionary Force [CEF]. The

\textsuperscript{12}Taylor Report, Part I, Memorandum 1, pp. 3-5.

training of the expeditionary force spread throughout the United States, Central America, and the Caribbean. The tank forces received training at Fort Knox, Kentucky. The guerrilla forces were trained at Belle Chaise, Louisiana, and the Panama Canal Zone. Key West, Florida, was the logistical center for the force. The maritime forces were trained at Vieques Island, Puerto Rico. Twelve American pilots were recruited from the Alabama, Arkansas, and Virginia Air National Guard. These pilots participated in formation flying and gunnery exercises with Cuban exile pilots at Retalheu. The staging area for the operation was at Puerto Cabezas on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua.14

In Washington skepticism grew as a result of the shift to a full-scale amphibious assault. General Robert E. Cushman, Jr., Vice President Nixon's executive assistant for national security affairs, called the operation pretty "hairy." He mentioned that if the invasion failed, the U.S. should be ready to put Marines on the beach. Realistically, Cushman admitted that the invasion was so big that it was going to be nearly impossible to avoid linking the United States to the operation.15 Neither Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates nor Undersecretary of State James Douglas felt


15 Higgins, 63-64.
comfortable with the operation. Gates called the expeditionary forces wholly inadequate. Douglas wanted to disassociate the DoD from the final approval of the operation.16

In November 1961 John F. Kennedy was elected President. Director of the CIA Allen Dulles briefed the new President on the Cuban situation on 17 and 29 November. Kennedy was impressed with the operation and told Dulles to carry on. There was little advice or direction given by either the Eisenhower or Kennedy Administration following Dulles' briefings. In the weeks following the election the government "floated in a void." Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., a member of Kennedy's inner circle of advisers, claimed that decisions were not made because neither camp wanted to make them. As a result, existing plans carried on as planned. Kennedy approved of the operation in general but warned planners to be ready for a review and discussion following the inauguration.17 Failure of either administration to act allowed the operation to gather greater momentum. More and more money and time were spent on the training of the expeditionary force.

16 Peter Wyden, Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 72.
The CIA was in a difficult position. Little, if any, direction came from the White House before the inauguration, but pressure from outside the United States began to grow. President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes of Guatemala, who earlier had granted the CIA permission to use a military base for training outside Retalheu, faced growing opposition to the training of the Cuban exiles. In December 1960 he told the CIA that the time was coming when the force would have to move out of Guatemala. The CIA seriously considered airlifting the expeditionary force to a small island in the Pacific. The CIA was becoming desperate about the security of the operation. The State Department objected to moving the entire force to the United States. By the turn of the new year the size of the force reached between 800 and 900 revolutionary exiles.\textsuperscript{18} That number eventually grew to over 1400 soldiers. The exile group consisted of a mix of farmers, fisherman, lawyers, doctors, and bankers. The group was formed into a brigade of soldiers ready for battle in little less than a year.\textsuperscript{19} On 3 January 1961 Eisenhower warned Kennedy that if the operation had any chance of success the incoming administration would have to act quickly. Castro's militia was growing in strength daily. Assistant Secretary of State Thomas Mann informed Kennedy

\textsuperscript{18}Bissell, 31-32.

\textsuperscript{19}Mario Lazo, "Decision for Disaster," \textit{Reader's Digest}, September 1964, 258-59.
that of the two hundred thousand members of Castro's militia, approximately 10 per cent were ready to fight for Castro and the number was increasing. Mann also stressed his opinion that U.S. military support was necessary for the operation to succeed.\textsuperscript{20} Kennedy listened to the briefs and deferred any decision until after the inauguration.

Another change in the plans took place in January 1961. The scope of the operation shifted from an amphibious landing and airborne assault to an operation consisting of a guerrilla strikes inside Cuba coinciding with the landings and air strikes. The Cuban expeditionary air force included B-26 bombers. The CIA chose B-26s in order to avoid the American government being associated with the operation. The B-26s were common warplanes in that region.

The increase in the magnitude of the operation was due to the changing environment in Cuba. In late November Castro partially mobilized the civilian militia in addition to his regular army forces in preparation for the imminent invasion. CIA-sponsored air drops to rebels inside Cuba became more and more ineffective as Castro continued to round up suspected guerrillas. The growing number of arms supplied to Cuba by the Soviet Union and Eastern-Bloc nations gave Castro a formidable force.\textsuperscript{21} The numbers of

\textsuperscript{20}Higgins, 72.

\textsuperscript{21}Taylor Report, Part I, Memorandum 1, p. 3.
exiles participating in the operation had to increase to ensure any probability of success. Neutralization of Castro's air force, tanks, and artillery emplacements was essential.

While the training of the brigade continued, relations between the United States and Cuba worsened. On 2 January 1961 Castro gave the American Embassy in Havana forty-eight hours to reduce the size of its diplomatic mission to a level on a par with the Cuban mission in Washington. In a meeting at the White House on 3 January, Eisenhower discussed breaking relations with Cuba. The President was tired of America "being kicked around" and warned that if any Americans in Cuba were hurt, he would not hesitate to send in the Marines. During the meeting Dulles advised Eisenhower that the paramilitary force training in Guatemala was the best military force in Central America and the time was right for launching the invasion. Support for Castro among Cuba's white collar workers eroded. Based on CIA's intelligence estimates, Castro's overall popularity rating in Cuba dropped from a 95 percent support level following his seizure of power to 25 to 33 percent.22 After the U.S. broke relations with Cuba on 4 January 1961, Eisenhower directed Herter to brief in-coming Secretary of State Dean

Rusk and see if Kennedy wanted to join in a united resolution concerning the Cuban situation. Rusk responded that in the absence of complete information on the entire situation, the Kennedy Administration elected to refrain from entering into a joint resolution. In the meantime Eisenhower's advisers recommended intervention against Castro. Time was on the side of Castro. Admiral Burke and the JCS were ardent proponents of the use of military force against Cuba. The Joint Chiefs favored the immediate overthrow of Castro but did not support the original CIA plan. Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum (JCSM) 44-61, "U.S. Plan of Action in Cuba," discussed the various options available to overthrow Castro. The plan recommended that the military devise and implement a plan of attack based on the use of Cuban revolutionaries with covert U.S. military support. Although similar to the original CIA concept, JCSM 44-61 provided alternatives in ascending order of magnitude and involvement to accomplish the mission:

1. Pressure—the U.S. pressures Cuba with economic sanctions, including embargoes, breaks diplomatic relations, encourages the use of the Organization of American States [OAS] to isolate Cuba, continue propaganda efforts, and continue naval and aerial surveillance. The Navy would provide the show of force during surveillance and naval

maneuvers off the coast of Cuba.

2. Internal Uprising— the U.S. would foster internal dissent and civil unrest through propaganda broadcasts, air drops of leaflets, and press releases. The military would provide whatever logistical support was necessary to assist the operation.

3. Volunteer Invasion Force with Covert American support— the U.S. would train and support a group of exiles in preparation for an invasion of Cuba. Again, the military would provide the logistical support.

4. Guerrilla Support with Covert Support— the U.S. would train guerrillas for insertion into Cuba to start guerrilla activities with covert U.S. military support.

5. Volunteer Invasion Force with Overt Action— the U.S. would train guerrilla forces to be inserted in Cuba to start guerrilla activities with direct U.S. military participation. In this course of action the Navy would provide a naval blockade.

6. Overt U.S. Action Supported by Latin American Volunteers— the U.S. military would invade with assistance from revolutionary volunteers. The invasion would be supported by a naval blockade.

7. Unilateral Overt U.S. Action— the U.S. military would invade with no assistance from outside forces. A naval blockade would coincide with the invasion.

The main emphasis of JCSM 44-61 was to propose the ascending
degrees of military involvement available depending on the success or failure of the initial actions. In conclusion, the JCS recommended the development of an interdepartmental group to review the various options available to the Administration. Eisenhower deferred a decision on the invasion to the incoming administration.

Kennedy was inaugurated on 20 January 1961. During his campaign he had promised a more successful policy towards Cuba. He harshly criticized the Republican Party for allowing Cuba to go communist. Kennedy promised not to remain passive towards Castro and was committed to helping the Cuban opposition eliminate Castro. Kennedy was impressed by the dedication of the exiles and the preparations already underway for invading Cuba. The CIA's plan was in accord with his own personal thinking. Kennedy felt that the shift in Cuba towards communism was like "seeing a treasured childhood retreat decay into a tawdry slumdom overrun by rowdy toughs."

On 28 January 1961 Kennedy held his first cabinet meeting to discuss the CIA's plan. During the meeting Dulles informed Kennedy that Cuba was totally dominated by

---

the communists and Castro was increasing the country's military power and influence in the region. Dulles claimed that while Castro was increasing his foundation of power, popular discontent was flourishing. A growing opposition movement to Castro was developing inside Cuba. Several covert operations were already in motion, such as propaganda broadcasts from Swan Island, sabotage of the Cuban sugar industry, and CIA-sponsored guerrilla attacks against Castro's strongholds. New Secretary of Defense McNamara countered Dulles' optimistic view of the situation by warning the President that no plan currently in place for the removal of Castro would succeed. Secretary of State Rusk echoed McNamara's sentiments. Rusk warned the President of the possible implications of covert action conducted without the support of the OAS. Kennedy authorized continuation of the plan and accentuation of propaganda efforts, political isolation of Castro, and sabotage of the Cuban sugar industry. He also directed the CIA and the JCS to review the proposals in their respective fields for the use of Cuban exile forces to overthrow Castro.27

In response to the President's directives of 28 January the JCS submitted Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum [JCSM] 57-61, "The Military Evaluation of the CIA

Paramilitary Plan, Cuba." The Joint Chiefs provided a thorough and concise evaluation of the military portion of the CIA's plan to overthrow Castro by an amphibious landing on the southern coast of Cuba near the town of Trinidad.

The plan that was reviewed by the JCS called for the operation to be conducted outside the town of Trinidad, an area with the ingredients necessary for a successful amphibious landing. The Amphibious Objective Area [AOA] was a semi-circle with a perimeter approximately eleven miles from Trinidad. A city was within the beachhead, as were an airfield, roads, a river, and an open bay. The perimeter was in low hill masses surrounded by large elevated hills, approximately seven hundred feet high. The overlooking hills provided adequate means for the defense of the beachhead. The area between the perimeter and the beachhead consisted of flat, heavily wooded land. Two good roads entered the AOA from the east and west with a railroad entering from the northeast. The area was suitable for the use of tanks and heavy mobile equipment.

The beachhead consisted of three small beaches, two at the mouth of the river and one on the west side of the bay. The sizes of the beaches varied from sixty to one hundred yards long with navigable waters. There were sufficient transit areas for small vehicles on the beaches. The air drop zone on the beach was approximately two thousand yards long on open, flat terrain. A key aspect of the plan was
that the beachhead was remote. The access roads into the area were limited. The routes limited incoming traffic. The rugged terrain facilitated the movement of guerrillas into the hills if the mission failed.

The invading force expected to encounter light resistance once the landing began. Each village and town in Cuba had a local militia unit. The size of the unit varied according to the size of the town. The units assembled on call from the police station. The police controlled the issue of weapons. The JCS suspected that the police controlled access to the weapons because Castro did not trust the militia to fight the guerrillas without turning on the government forces.28

According to the plan, on the day before the invasion (D-1), an air strike would be conducted against Cuban aircraft on the ground, naval patrol vessels, key communications facilities, radar sites, microwave facilities, tank and artillery positions at Managua, the highway and railroad bridges outside the beachhead, as well as other bridges. At approximately 2000 on D-1 a diversionary landing would be staged on the northwest coast of Cuba by two Underwater Demolition Teams [UDTs]. If the initial air strike failed, late on the night of D-1 paratroops would be dropped into the beachhead to blow up

According to the plan, on the day of the invasion (D-Day) a U.S. Navy amphibious landing ship (LSD), with a well deck to carry landing craft (LCUs and LCVPs), would off-load the boats and personnel. Prior to dawn on D-Day the B-26s would conduct a second air strike against the beach, air strip, and any remaining targets left from the previous air strike. At dawn the task force would land by boat and parachute drops from air planes on the east and west beach. The beachhead would be secured by closing the access roads on the perimeter. If all went according to schedule, the AOA would be secured by nightfall. If the landings were successful, defections would be expected from the Cuban military and civilian populace. If the operation failed, the task force would have the capability of converting to guerrilla warfare tactics and heading for the jungles to join up with local guerrilla groups and continue operations from bases in the Escambray Mountains.

It was imperative for the initial air strike to knock out the Cuban Air Force if the operation was going to succeed. Fourteen of the seventeen B-26s would be used for this purpose. The planes would be piloted by six American volunteer pilots and twelve Cuban exiles. The Cubans were

\[29\text{Ibid., 20.}\]
\[30\text{Ibid., 20-21.}\]
better at dive and skip bombing and at strafing than were the U.S. pilots. To ensure that mission objectives were met, American pilots would be used in each strike against Castro's air force. Each aircraft would be armed with two 700 lb. napalm bombs, sixteen 220 lb. fragmentary bombs, plus eight .50 caliber machine guns with 2400 rounds of ammunition. All the flights would originate at Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, until the airstrip in the AOA was secured.

In its review of the plan, the JCS pointed out that a problem existed with the limited on-station time of the aircraft. The flight to Cuba from Puerto Cabezas was over two hours each way. If the aircraft carried napalm they could stay in the area only twenty minutes with one hour of fuel in reserve. Those aircraft not carrying napalm could stay in the area for approximately two hours with one hour of fuel in reserve. The limited on-station time meant that the initial air strikes had to be accurate and that there was little chance of repeat strikes if there were any enemy air opposition.\(^\text{31}\) The lack of on-station time lessened the probability of maintaining air superiority, and that would possibly create the need for American military assistance.

The Cuban Air Force, though limited, could provide formidable opposition if not eliminated or neutralized. The

\(^\text{31}\) Ibid., 22-23.
Cuban air inventory included fourteen Sea Furies, three F-47s, one F-51, thirteen B-26s, six TBM-38s, fifteen transport type aircraft, and twenty-two helicopters. One fatal omission in the evaluation of the plan was the lack of information on Castro's T-33 trainer jet aircraft. This flaw would become apparent as the invasion progressed.

The evaluation by the JCS brought to light several problems that the expeditionary forces could expect during the invasion. Even though the air strike and parachute drops were intended to destroy the bridges in the beachhead, the brigade had no bridging or engineering capability to reconstruct the bridges and roads once the AOA was secured. The failure to include these units would ensure the landing force a secure beachhead with no possible escape except to the sea. The load-out of the brigade's ships included no flood-light trailers for night time off-loads on the beach. The manning of the force did not provide adequately trained or sufficiently numbered shore party personnel to handle heavy off-loading on the beach. The off-loading of the invading forces' ships was to be conducted by contract labor, not members of the brigade. This could pose a problem after the shooting started. The CIA did not take into account the difficulty of off-loading the ships into the LCUs. It was impractical and nearly impossible to load

---

32Ibid., 7.
trucks and heavy gear off ships to LCUs at sea. The JCS also found fault in the method of fuel replenishment for the tanks, trucks, and boats. The three thousand gallon refuelers were to be used for aviation fuel (AVGAS) at the air strip. Fuel for the boats, tanks, and trucks (MOGAS) used wobble pumps. Hand-pumping gasoline was time-consuming and dangerous in the dark. Night time refueling would require a lighting system, flood-light trucks and at least one crane. The JCS also concluded that the plan did not consider the problem of distributing supplies on the beach. The intent to have each platoon drawing supplies as it needed was impractical and encouraged pilfering. The plan also failed to consider repair and maintenance facilities or tank retrievers for broken-down tanks and trucks. The most important fault was the lack of provisions made for the evacuation of personnel and equipment.33

Although the flaws were numerous, the JCS did find some positive aspects to the plan. Based on CIA intelligence estimates the Joint Chiefs concluded that the landing would probably be unopposed. There would be little air opposition with plenty of friendly air support available if the Cuban Air Force was eliminated. The terrain was ideal for the defense of the AOA. Because of its proximity to the mountains and the anticipated network of guerrillas,

33 Ibid., 26-27.
the invading force could expect local assistance during the invasion. The JCS felt that the high motivation and morale of the brigade would overcome any obstacles or difficulties encountered during the operation. 24

In conclusion, the JCS felt that the plan had a "fair chance" of success. It was not an approval of the plan. To them success of the operation would be dependent on several factors. The operation would be dependent on local Cuban support which required constant observation of the internal situation in Cuba from Washington. Careful consideration had to be given to the airlifting of the brigade from Retalheu to the embarkation point at Puerto Cabezas. The movement might compromise the security of the operation. In view of the complexity of the loading and marshalling phases of the operation, the JCS recommended that the plan would need to be continually reviewed to ensure proper interdepartment coordination and command and control and to ensure that security would not be jeopardized. Surprise would be essential. The JCS felt that if CIA intelligence estimates of the Cuban air capability were sound and surprise were attained, the brigade would be large enough to make the plan succeed. The airborne assault should not be opposed, so it had a strong possibility of succeeding. The amphibious assault should be successful against marginal

24 Ibid., 37.
opposition, but logistical support was lacking. If the invading force ran into considerable opposition, the logistical support would then be totally inadequate. The scheme to secure the beachhead was sound but additional planning would be required for the control and utilization of indigenous facilities and personnel in a combat and support role. With no interference from expeditionary aircraft, assault troops, or guerrillas, Castro's forces could move substantial forces to the beachhead by D +2. It would take at least two days for the CEF to plan and launch a response to a Cuban counterattack. Since the Cuban army lacked experience in coordinated offensive actions, the invasion force should be able to successfully resist Castro's initial attacks. Even without local volunteers, a popular uprising, or the introduction of substantial follow-on forces, the JCS believed that the brigade had the capability to capture the beach.35

The Joint Chiefs' overall impression was that the operation would not require overt American military intervention. The report gave a favorable assessment tempered by the identification of deficiencies that needed to be addressed before the invasion began. The objectives were dependent on the degree of popular support and success of the political and psychological part of the plan rather

35Ibid., 2.
than on purely military factors. The JCS recommended that a team of Army, Navy, and Air Force observers be sent to Central America to assess the training and battle readiness of the forces.\(^{36}\) The JCS evaluation should have been viewed as a report that created more questions than answers. It should not have been viewed by some in the Kennedy Administration as a blanket military approval of the Trinidad Plan. The weakness in the JCS memorandum was that there was no clear signal sent to administration officials concerning the military's overall support or lack of support for the plan.

Even though the JCS gave a lukewarm endorsement to the Trinidad Plan, there was great concern about the effectiveness of a military plan drawn by civilians, run by civilians, and with little, if any, military support. Three JCS representatives went to Guatemala to evaluate the status of the training of the CEF. Their evaluation, JCSM 146-61, indicated an overall satisfaction with the training. The representatives stressed that in order to attain complete surprise, the brigade should be airlifted to the landing site. Airlifting the troops to Cuba instead of conducting an amphibious landing would serve two purposes. First, the entire force could be landed within one day of departure. Second, an air drop of paratroops had a greater probability

\(^{36}\)Ibid., 3, 38.
of catching the Cubans off-guard. The JCS observers noted a problem that would affect the surprise and security of the operation. The mayor of Retalheu was a communist. A short wave radio transmitter operated in the city. The Communist Party dropped propaganda leaflets in Guatemala City describing the entire operation while the brigade trained in Retalheu. With a town dominated by communists one mile away from the training site, a railroad on one side of the camp, and a highway on the other, the air movement of the troops from Retalheu to Puerto Cabezas would almost certainly be noticed. The only thing Castro would not have known was when and where the forces were going to land.37

Based on their observations of the security conditions at both Retalheu and Puerto Cabezas, the JCS representatives concluded that the odds against achieving surprise during the invasion were as high as five to one. If surprise was not achieved, the group concluded that the air missions would fail.38 Even if surprise were accomplished, the chances of keeping American involvement out of sight would be minimal.

The CIA was operating under strict guidelines that there be no American military involvement, and American-sponsored activities needed to be minimized. The directives

38Ibid, 8.
were extended to include no American support for the air strikes launched on D-Day. Kennedy faced a dilemma. Too little U.S. support for the operation would bring failure. Too much military involvement would show U.S. complicity in the operation. Yet, Kennedy wanted the operation to succeed with no U.S. involvement. JCS planners had a difficult time working under these guidelines. It would be difficult to deny American involvement in an operation that large. The forces that the CIA built were as sizable as many armies in that region of the world. It was an army that lacked experienced military guidance and direction for such a complex operation.

Brigade 2506, the Cuban Expeditionary Force, had grown to 1442 Cuban exiles by January 1961. The task force consisted of 1004 personnel, organized as one infantry battalion of four rifle companies. One rifle company consisted of paratroopers. The battalion was armed with mortars, .77 mm recoilless rifles, and a tank platoon consisting of five M41 tanks. Other arms included pistols, M-1 rifles, grenade launchers, submachine guns, .57 mm recoilless rifles, flame throwers, and rocket launchers. It was a formidable arsenal. The brigade's air force consisted of seventeen B-26s, ten C-54s, and five C-46s, supported by one hundred ground personnel and eighteen pilots. The vast

---

"Taylor Report, Part I, Memorandum I, pp. 7-8."
size of the brigade narrowed the CIA's options on the means of transporting the force to Cuba. Transporting a force this large by air would have been difficult. The only feasible option was to transport the brigade by ships. The brigade's maritime force consisted of seven World War II amphibious ships. CINCLANT provided a Navy dock landing ship (LSD) to transport the brigade's four utility craft (LCUs) and three personnel carriers (LCVPs). The brigade's landing ships and craft were purchased by the CIA early in the operation from American commercial shipping lines.40

As the training continued, uncertainty and doubt grew in the Kennedy Administration. During a briefing on 17 February 1961 Secretary of State Rusk proposed that the operation be delayed so that the State Department could gather support from members of the OAS. Kennedy still wanted to resolve the Cuban problem through diplomatic channels. He was reluctant to commit the United States to a military operation when a political solution was still attainable. The guerrilla infiltration idea still appealed to Kennedy but he wanted to give the diplomats a chance solve the problem.41 The plan to land an amphibious force and hold the beachhead long enough to establish a

40Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 9, pp. 7-16.
provisional government had its positive merits, but the administration did not want to be forced into a position of "political bankruptcy." Kennedy questioned how such a large operation could be stopped after all the time and training had been put into it. If Kennedy called it off, he would have a disposal problem consisting of the fifteen hundred members of the brigade. Latin American leaders were unwilling to take the brigade. If the brigade returned to the U.S., Kennedy might be accused of not supporting fighters of communism in the region. Kennedy was concerned about the political ramifications at home if he cancelled the mission. The Republicans, attacked by Kennedy during the election for being soft of communism, would have a political field day with his perceived lack of commitment toward fighting the communists. If the brigade were disbanded, it might encourage the further spread of Castro's revolution throughout the region. The contingency had become a necessity. The CIA created the brigade and was forced into a position of having to use it. Kennedy was uncertain of what action to take. Kennedy listened to his advisers' arguments and agreed with Dulles that maybe the best place for the Cuban exiles was in Cuba.42

On 11 March 1961 Kennedy met with the National Security Council in the White House to receive a status

42Schlesinger, 242.
report on the operation. Bissell submitted a summary of the CIA plan, "Proposed Operation Against Cuba." The summary included an overview of the operation and a report on the status of the training of the brigade. Bissell stated that the Trinidad Plan had a greater chance to succeed if a diversionary landing preceded the actual invasion. Once the beachhead was secured, the CIA would transport the provisional government to the site. The exile government would assume power and the United States would recognize it. Bissell claimed that the strength of the force would withstand Castro's initial counterattack and allow the beachhead to remain secure. Kennedy grew wary of the size of the operation. He directed the CIA to establish a less conspicuous plan, preferably a night landing, not like a World War II amphibious landing. On 13 March Bissell returned and presented three alternatives for landing sites:

1. The Preston area on the northern coast of Oriente Province.
2. The south coast of Las Villas Province between Trinidad and Cienfuegos.
3. The eastern Zapata region near Cochinos Bay, the Bay of Pigs.

Following discussions of each site, Kennedy directed the JCS to review each plan and make recommendations.43

In "An Evaluation of the Military Aspects of Alternative Concepts, CIA Paramilitary Plan, Cuba," JCSM 166-61, the JCS reviewed the three proposed alternatives to the Trinidad Plan. The first alternative called for a diversionary landing on the night of D -1 followed by a night-time landing in the Preston area of Oriente Province on D-Day. The landings would be conducted without airborne landings or air strikes. Control of the beachhead would be accomplished by seizing four strong points surrounding the area. Local guerrillas would be contacted and an air strip cleared. The advantage of this alternative was that a night landing afforded a higher probability of surprise. The surrounding mountains provided ample cover for the invading force. The landing area was near the main seat of government and the Cubans in the area were opposed to Castro's rule. It also provided the best beachhead of the three alternatives. The major disadvantage was that B-26s could not land on the air strip, and without air cover the Cuban Air Force would destroy the landing force. Another disadvantage was the inexperience of the task force in conducting amphibious operations at night. A successful operation in this region was doubtful.

The second alternative called for an amphibious landing on the south coast of Las Villas Province. That operation consisted of night paratroop drops prior to the landing on D-Day to seize key points and the local pier.
Following the seizure of the pier, ships would dock and off-load. Units of the task force would move inland and seize an air field and other strategic points, and establish communications with the airborne company. The objective area consisted of rolling hills backed by swamps. The area would provide ideal protection and concealment for the brigade. The advantage was that the beachhead was so isolated that it would be easy to secure. The Joint Chiefs concluded, however, that the disadvantages of this option outweighed the advantages. Surprise might not be achieved due to the presence of a local company of Cuban regulars. The air strip had limited capabilities and was too far from the seat of government. The only escape was by sea. The mountains were over ten miles away. It would be difficult to support logistically because of its isolated location. Like the first alternative, a landing in Las Villas Province had little chance of success.

The third alternative was landing in the eastern Zapata region in the Bahia de Cochinos, or Bay of Pigs. This plan called for a D-2 air strike of all Cuban air fields, communication centers, bridges, strategic road junctions, and tank and artillery emplacements. The plan was almost identical to the Trinidad Plan except for the location of the landing. A dawn invasion would be supported by another air strike in conjunction with air drops. The beachhead could be easily secured. On one side of the bay
were swamps. On the other side of the bay were three good beaches surrounded by heavily wooded jungles. An air strip was nearby and capable of handling B-26s and large transport planes. The site was away from any sizable town or military detachment. Although still favoring the original Trinidad Plan, the JCS felt that the Zapata Plan had the highest probability of succeeding, although the plan was no less conspicuous than the Trinidad Plan. The operation had perhaps a 50 percent chance of succeeding. The JCS were not unified in their support of either the Trinidad or Zapata Plan. The Joint Chiefs reviewed the alternatives and made their recommendations based on the information provided by the CIA. The JCS based their recommendation on which alternative had the highest probability of succeeding, not on whether the plans would work. Kennedy approved the Zapata plan on 16 March and retained the power to call off the operation at any time.

Some senior administration officials objected to the entire operation. Assistant Secretary of State Chester Bowles vehemently opposed the operation. The plan violated the charter of the OAS in which no member of the organization could use coercive, forceful actions upon another member of the organization. An American-sponsored

\footnote{Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 12, pp. 1-2.}

\footnote{Higgins, 98-99.}
attack would be in direct violation of this charter. Bowles felt that the American chances of success were limited. If the operation failed, Castro’s prestige in the region would grow. He would solidify his position and receive greater support from the Soviet Union. Even if successful, the operation would have an adverse effect on world opinion. The possible gains were not worth the risks.46

Kennedy also heard arguments against the operation from within his own inner circle of advisers. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., White House Chief of Staff, warned the President that the Bay of Pigs was his first major foreign policy decision. It would easily wipe out the good will created by years of work. The possible negative diplomatic repercussions should be considered prior to making a final decision.47

Some on Capitol Hill knowledgeable about the plan opposed the invasion. Senator William Fulbright (D-Ark) was concerned. He thought that Kennedy had two options: overthrow Castro, or tolerate his abuses and try to isolate him. Fulbright did not favor the first option. It would violate the charter of the OAS and was contrary to American law. If the overthrow were successful, the U.S. would be burdened with maintaining support of a post-Castro

---

47 Schlesinger, 240.
government. If that government were falling, the U.S. would be forced to intervene unilaterally to prop it up. Fulbright's opposition grew the more he was informed of the operation:

To give this activity even covert support is of a piece with the hypocrisy and cynicism for which the U.S. is constantly denouncing the Soviet Union in the United Nations and elsewhere. This point will not be lost on the rest of the world—nor on our own consciences.  

Fulbright favored isolation of Castro. The Alliance for Progress would be the perfect vehicle for ostracizing Castro among Latin American leaders. Fulbright succinctly stated that "the Castro regime is a thorn in the flesh; but it is not a dagger in the heart."  

Even in the JCS there were vocal opponents to the operation. General David M. Shoup, Commandant of the Marine Corps, an expert of amphibious operations, was the only member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff opposed to the operation. He disliked foreign interventions. In a briefing to senior administration officials Shoup asked, "Do any of you gentlemen know how big Cuba is?" While he waited for an answer, he proceeded to place an overlay of Cuba on a map of the U.S. Cuba stretched from Washington, D.C. to Chicago, nearly eight hundred miles. He then placed another overlay with a red dot on it over Cuba. He then stated to

46 Schlesinger, 251.
47 Ibid.
the officials, "That, gentlemen, represents the size of the island of Tarawa and it took us three days and eighteen thousand Marines to take it." 50

A decision had to be made, but only the President could make it. The JCS felt that it was necessary to remove Castro from power, but the Zapata Plan did not meet their desires. There were too many weaknesses. Only direct military involvement would save the operation. The President was unwilling to go that far. The CIA stressed that the operation had gained so much momentum that it would be difficult to cancel. The pressure of having to act forced the President into having to approve a plan about which he did not feel comfortable. It was a decision that Kennedy wanted to avoid.

50 Ranelagh, 364.
CHAPTER THREE
A POOR PLAN POORLY EXECUTED

Prior to the development of the Bay of Pigs operation, the Navy established a series of contingencies in the Caribbean. The emergence of the Soviet Union as Cuba's dominant ally created critical strategic problems for American naval planners. Once Castro opened his ports to Moscow and other eastern-bloc nations in 1960, the perceived threat of Soviet submarines and surface ships in the Atlantic Ocean now extended to the Caribbean Sea. It is understandable that the Navy, in a strategic sense, favored the removal of Castro. A friendly neighbor in the Caribbean reduced the need for strategic planners to concentrate forces in that region. American force planners had to contend with a possible hostile neighbor on their southern front. U.S. submarine, air, and surface assets would have to be pulled away from the primary threat region in the Atlantic.

The Navy stepped up its activity in the Caribbean in response to the perceived threat from Cuba. A standing Caribbean naval force was created consisting of a destroyer squadron and a Marine Amphibious Ready Group homeported in Roosevelt Roads, Puerto Rico. An exercise consisting of an
amphibious landing and naval gunfire was conducted in March 1961 on Vieques Island, off the southeast tip of Puerto Rico. Anti-submarine warfare exercises were conducted in the Key West Operations Area using submarines from Submarine Squadron Twelve.

Although directed not to become involved in the planning of the Bay of Pigs operation, the Navy did play a major logistical role in the establishment of the Swan Island communication site. The CIA's Swan Island operation, code named "Operation Crosspatch," depended heavily on the support of the Navy. Navy equipment and personnel were used to help construct the radio station and airstrip on the island. The CIA originally intended that the Swan Island project be considered a clandestine operation. But the Navy objected and asked that it be made into a "commercial" station partly because of the Navy's role in establishing it, but also because it would be difficult to remain "clandestine" when the Cubans possessed radio direction finding equipment capable of tracing the location of the site. The CIA consented and asked for an additional Navy destroyer squadron to provide protection for Swan Island. The Navy agreed to provide a few minesweepers.

---

2 Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Jr., USN (Ret), Interview by Dr. John P. Mason, Jr., August 1975, Oral History Collection, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, Maryland, 330-31.
Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Commander in Chief, Atlantic Fleet, [CINCLANT], was aware that the Caribbean situation was heating up following the construction of the Swan Island communication site. Like Admiral Burke, Dennison never received initial briefings on the training or invasion aspects of the operation. He first heard that something was awry in November 1960. Vice Admiral G. C. Towner, Commander, Amphibious Forces, Atlantic Fleet [PHIBLANT], told Dennison that the commanding officer of the USS SAN MARCOS (LSD 25), while in port at Roosevelt Roads, was approached by two CIA men. They asked if they could "requisition" his ship to carry some landing craft and crew from Vieques to a location off southern Cuba. The CIA men couldn't tell the commanding officer what the operation was all about. The commanding officer responded that he did not own the ship and did not have the authority to allow the CIA to "requisition" his ship. He could not respond to the request because he would have to check with his Navy superiors. Following Towner's briefing, Dennison was livid. He called General Lemnitzer, Chairman of the JCS, to find out what was going on. Lemnitzer said, "Don't you know?" Dennison replied, "I don't know anymore than I've already told you. What's it all about? I'm not going to turn my ship over to a couple of characters who say they're from CIA
or any place else." Lemnitzer agreed to arrange a briefing
of the operation for Dennison. On 2 November Bissell
travelled to Norfolk and briefed Dennison on the operation.

Dennison was not satisfied with Bissell's brief.

Dennison felt that Bissell was withholding information.
What was supposed to be done if Castro retaliated and made a
move on Guantanamo? Dennison thought the plan was "stupid."
"I think any military man who had anything to do with it
could have told them the same thing. We weren't asked to
approve anything. We were just being told that this was by
direction of the President and this was what was to be
done. . . ." He thought it was a risky operation that would
probably fail and the U.S. Navy would be asked to come to
the rescue. 4

The entire idea appalled Dennison. He was the
commander of the Atlantic Fleet, yet he received no
intelligence support to assist him in the development of
operation orders, rules of engagement, and movement orders.
Following his briefing with Bissell, Dennison requested
specific intelligence support from the CIA. The request
consisted of over ninety intelligence requirements on the
Cuban counter-revolutionary forces. Of the ninety requests,
only twelve were fully answered. The other information was

3Ibid., 332-33.

4Ibid., 333-35.
sparse and provided limited information on Castro's forces. Dennison had to make do with what he had at his disposal. There was little cooperation between the CIA and CINCLANT. Dennison and his staff did not know what the CIA was doing.

Because of the limited intelligence on Cuba Dennison relied on the dexterity of his staff to be able to draw contingency plans for the operation. There was such a cloud of secrecy over the project that everything was passed by word of mouth. Although favoring the security aspects of the operation Admiral Burke questioned the plan's probability of success without supporting paper work and discussion:

> Very seldom are decisions made without paper work. Decisions are made in conferences. Without the advice of someone who knows there is [sic] no checks and balances in the operation.

CINCLANT planners were also skeptical. An operation conducted by word of mouth was not a good way to do business. The lack of written directives created a greater probability of someone making a mistake. On 9 February 1961 Admiral Burke instructed members of his staff to travel to Norfolk to give Dennison a status report of the

---

5. Ibid., 339.


7. Admiral Horatio Rivero, Jr., USN (Ret), Interview by Dr. John P. Mason, Jr., March 1978, Oral History Collection, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, Md., 333-34.
operation. The briefing consisted of a description of the operation up to the arrival in the Amphibious Objective Area [AOA]. Of particular emphasis was the use of the Navy LSD and no ties to American involvement. Again, Dennison received no guidance on the measures necessary to protect Guantanamo.8 Admiral Horatio Rivero, Jr., Dennison's Deputy Chief of Staff, recalled, "All we had to do was to be prepared to play some part which we weren't quite sure what it was, at some time we weren't quite sure when it would be. It was the most fouled up thing I ever saw."9

Following the severing of U.S.-Cuban relations, American intelligence sources dried up. The government was unclear of the intelligence estimates of the strength of Castro and his forces. Soviet ships off-loaded at night. Rumors were rampant concerning whether the Cubans possessed Soviet MIGs, tanks, artillery, and communications equipment. Intelligence-gathering was merely conjecture, a true "crystal ball operation." The Navy was forbidden to conduct reconnaissance flights out of Guantanamo or Key West. Roosevelt Roads was too far away to be an adequate intelligence gathering center. Dennison's primary concern throughout the planning and execution phases of the operation was the defense of Guantanamo. Dennison countered

---

8 Dennison, 341-43.
9 Rivero, 333-34.
the supposed growth of Castro's forces around Guantanamo by deploying a Battalion Landing Team [BLT] and an Amphibious Squadron [PHIBRON] to Guantanamo. The USS Galveston (CLG 3), a 6"-gun cruiser, moved from Roosevelt Roads to Guantanamo. An additional attack squadron was added to Guantanamo. Destroyers receiving refresher training remained in Guantanamo indefinitely.10

CINCLANT planners could not narrow their field of view to the defense of Guantanamo. Key West was only ninety miles from the coast of Cuba. Dennison ordered the commanding officer of the naval station to increase his defense posture. Dennison requested additional protection from the Strategic Air Command [CINCSAC] through the JCS. CINCSAC responded by conducting Exercise "Southern Tip" in April 1961. The exercise called for the Commander of the North American Air Defenses [CONAD] to integrate forces from all the services and add them to the defenses and surveillance of the southern Florida region. JCS directed CINCLANT and CINCSAC to provide forces for the "exercise." CINCLANT provided an additional carrier fighter squadron to bolster Key West defenses.11

10 Dennison, 338, 345.
11 Ibid., 345; United States Navy, Joint Chiefs of Staff Memorandum 1899/649, 25 April 1961, Record Group 218, File 3144, Box 44, Sect. 1, National Archives, Washington, D.C.
In addition to the increased defense posture, Dennison had other means of gathering intelligence. The Navy conducted frequent covert electronic surveillance off the coast of Cuba. During March and April 1961, the USS *Perry* (DD 844), homeported in Mayport, Florida, was temporarily assigned to Key West Naval Station. The *Perry* was electronically configured to conduct electronic "eavesdropping," intercepting Cuban radio transmissions. Additionally, the *Perry* was equipped with electronic equipment designed to transmit signals similar to those of a task force. At times the *Perry* approached as close as three miles to the coast of Cuba. The *Perry* navigated around the coast of Cuba listening and transmitting signals to confuse Castro's forces. Several times the signals fooled Castro into making his naval forces sortie in response to the perceived threat of an invasion.1 2

Submarines in Submarine Squadron Twelve homeported in Key West, were used to conduct surveillance missions of the Cuban coast. The USS *Threadfin* (SS 410) frequently conducted coastal surveillance missions, missions to monitor shipping in and out of Cuba, and special missions navigating Cuban coastal waters for future references. The *Threadfin*

---

1 Admiral Arleigh Burke, interview by author, 16 September 1988, tape recording, Fairfax, Virginia; Captain Lionel Krisel, interview by author, 12 September 1988, telephone interview, Long Beach, California; USS *Perry* (DD 849) Deck Logs, March-April 1961, National Archives and Record Center, Washington, D.C.
played a major role in the operation later in April.¹³

On 24 March 1961 the JCS notified CINCLANT that there would be a requirement to provide additional naval support for "Operation Crosspatch," which was now the code word for the entire operation. The JCS directed CINCLANT to use one destroyer to escort the CEF ships from Central America to the rendezvous point five miles off the coast of Cuba. After arriving at the rendezvous point, the destroyers were not supposed to come any closer than three miles to the coast. A Navy dock landing ship (LSD) would be used to transport three utility boats (LCUs), and four motorized personnel carriers (LCVPs) of the Cuban Expeditionary Force [CEF] from Vieques to the rendezvous with the other brigade ships. Naval air cover would be provided for the CEF ships from sunrise to sunset while enroute to the AOA. D-Day was scheduled for 5 April 1961.¹⁴

On 28 March CINCLANT notified JCS that an anti-submarine warfare exercise was scheduled between 3-18 April in the Gulf of Mexico. The anti-submarine warfare carrier USS Essex (CVS 9), accompanied by USS Murray (DDE 576), USS Waller (DDE 466), USS Conv (DDE 508), USS Conway (DDE 509), USS Bache (DDE 470), USS Beale (DDE 471), and USS Eaton (DDE 510), would participate in the exercise. Dennison proposed

¹³Krisel interview, 12 September 1988.
using two destroyers in mutual support of the CEF, defending against surface and air attacks, and to act as "shepherding" units in case any of the brigade ships became separated. Dennison notified the JCS that he had already deployed the standing Caribbean amphibious squadron to the area. An additional eighteen destroyers were scheduled to receive refresher training between 3-17 April. Jet fighter squadrons were deployed to Key West and Guantanamo. In order to avoid any appearances of increased U.S. presence in the area, Dennison scheduled a port visit for the Marine Battalion Landing Team to Jamaica on 13 April.

In the preliminary Rules of Engagement [ROE] submitted to JCS, CINCLANT recommended that in the event a Cuban naval vessel or suspicious unknown vessel attempted to close the force, the escort destroyers would maneuver to remain between the vessel and the CEF ships. The Cuban or unknown vessel would be warned not to approach any closer than gun range of the convoy. If the craft continued to close the formation, a warning shot would be shot across the bow. If the contact closed within two thousand yards or opened fire on the convoy, the Navy ships would be authorized to open fire until the ship either would surrender, retire, or be destroyed.

The ROE contained instructions for combat air patrols and air controllers. Combat air patrols would identify any aircraft approaching radar range. If the aircraft were
Cuban, the combat air patrol would make a fly-by to make sure the Cuban aircraft would be aware of the American presence. If the Cuban aircraft continued to close the force, the U.S. combat air patrol would continue to make attempts to divert the supposed hostile threat. If the Cuban aircraft were to make attempts to get into a position to attack the convoy, authorization would be granted for the combat air patrol to fire on the Cuban aircraft.

The concluding recommendation from CINCLANT was a planner's ominous forewarning. The code name "Operation Crosspatch" was already used to describe the Swan Island operation. In order to avoid any confusion CINCLANT recommended changing the name of the U.S. naval aspects of the operation to "Operation Bumpy Road."  

On 1 April 1961 the JCS approved CINCLANT's ROE in JCSM 363-61. All aspects of the ROE were approved and additional directions were inserted concerning the possible presence of Soviet submarines. In the event that the convoy were to be shadowed or closed by a surfaced submarine, it would be treated as a surface ship. If the submarine was submerged, the destroyer escorts would request the unknown submarine contact to identify itself. If the submarine failed to identify itself after a second request, the escort ships would warn the contact that it would be attacked if it

\[15\text{Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 29, Tab A, pp. 1-4.}\]
failed to do so. If the submarine still failed to identify itself, the escorts were to treat the submarine as if it were preparing to attack. Permission would be given to attack the submarine using all authorized means possible until it either would retire, surface and identify itself, or be destroyed. JCSM 363-61 also approved changing the code word of the Navy's involvement in the operation to "Operation Bumpy Road."\(^{16}\)

Monday, 3 April 1961, appeared to be a routine day at the Destroyer-Submarine Piers, Norfolk Naval Station. The skies were clear with the temperatures approaching fifty degrees. The Murray, Eaton, Cony, Conway, Bache, and Beale were making preparations to get underway for what was thought to be anti-submarine warfare operations off the coast of Rhode Island. The ships were part of Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Eight of the Anti-Submarine Warfare Hunter-Killer Force Atlantic under the flag of the Rear Admiral John Clark, Commander, Task Group 81.8. The routine steaming schedule consisted of two weeks underway trying to locate and identify Soviet submarines in the Atlantic. The underway period was followed by two weeks in port for maintenance and upkeep. The underway cycle continued after the inport period. Operations were routine and this appeared to be another typical underway period. Underway

time for the ships of Destroyer Squadron Twenty-Eight was between 0830 and 1000.\textsuperscript{17}

Once underway the Eaton led the formation out of the Thimble Shoals Channel. At 1225 the Murray and Eaton rendezvoused and took station on the Essex and proceeded south with the other ships in the formation following behind. The transit was uneventful. Drills at general quarters, gunnery exercises, steering casualty drills, and small arms practice filled the ships' schedules. At night the Murray and Eaton conducted flashing light drills, a normal underway exercise between two ships. What made this exercise different was that the flashing lights on the signal bridges were jury-rigged so that they could be controlled by the Combat Information Center to be used as search lights. Under the supervision of Captain Robert Crutchfield, Commander, Destroyer Division 281, on board the Eaton, the ships took turns trying to locate each other in the darkness. The ships conducted this exercise throughout the transit.

Once the squadron arrived off the coast of Jacksonville, Florida, it became obvious that the operation was no longer a typical anti-submarine sweep in the

\textsuperscript{17}Captain William Smoot, USNR (Ret), Interview by Dr. John P. Mason, Jr., 3 April 1973, Oral History Department, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, Md., 1-2; USS Murray (DD 576) Deck Logs, 3 April 1961, National Archives and Record Center, Washington, D.C.
Atlantic. The Essex, normally configured to handle anti-submarine warfare S-3 aircraft had been modified to land and launch A-4D fighter/attack aircraft. The squadron of A-4Ds landed on board the Essex on 5 April. Questions concerning the presence of the A-4Ds on the Essex remained unanswered. The operation was cloaked in secrecy. The only thing obvious to the crews of the ships was that the formation remained on a southerly course throughout the transit. No one was allowed to see the navigation charts with the exception of the Commanding Officer, and the Executive Officer, who plotted the ship's position and determined courses and speeds required to stay on track.18

The secrecy continued as the squadron proceeded westward past Key West and into the Gulf of Mexico. On 7 April the squadron received fuel from the USS Elokomin (AO 55). During the refueling evolution the Murray received Lieutenants (Junior Grade) James W. Corey and Robert W. Sickles from the Elokomin by high-line transfer. Personnel transfers were common and quite frequent during replenishment details. But Corey and Sickles' presence raised suspicions among the crew of the Murray. They were specially trained air traffic controllers. Another unusual event took place later that afternoon. The Murray and Eaton conducted towing exercises. Exercises like these are not

18Smoot, 2-3.
ordinary or common. They are time-extensive and require
deft ship handling. There was little margin of error when
towing another vessel. The exercise lasted for
approximately two hours with each ship taking turns towing
the other.¹⁹

While Task Group 81.8 was in transit to the Gulf of
Mexico, discussions continued in Washington concerning the
Navy's ROE. Secretary McNamara received a briefing from the
JCS and was told that once the President gave the go-ahead
for the operation, the ROE would be submitted for his
approval. After discussing the ROE with the Joint Chiefs,
McNamara felt that too much authority was given to the
individual lower levels of command. Another concern dealt
with the possibility of the U.S. being seen as an active
participant in the operation. McNamara directed the JCS to
ensure that there was no way the U.S. would become overtly
involved in the operation. Following a meeting with General
Lemnitzer, Dulles, Bissell and General Charles P. Cabell,
Deputy Director of the CIA, McNamara stated that if the U.S.
were drawn into supporting the CEF in transit the operation
would be called off and the CEF forces would be directed to
a port chosen by the CIA.²⁰

¹⁹USS Elokomin (AO 55) Deck Logs, 7 April 1961,
National Archives and Record Center, Washington, D.C.; USS

Even though the ships were already underway, the JCS notified CINCLANT that D-Day was postponed on 5 April for at least forty-eight hours. This was too late to stop a scheduled anti-submarine sweep of the Central American coast. On 6 April Kennedy was uncomfortable with the size of the operation. He expressed his desire that all efforts be made to keep the American presence in the operation at as low a profile as possible. Precautions needed to be made to insure that U.S. support for the CEF was not apparent and that the U.S. could "plausibly deny" any participation in the operation. Acting on the President's directives the JCS modified the ROE in JCSM 179-61. The Navy would provide area coverage rather than convoy protection for the CEF ships. During daylight hours the escorting destroyers would maintain a practical range ahead of the force and steer courses and speeds in such a way as to maintain protection but not appear to be screening. During the night the destroyers would take station close enough to provide adequate protection. The Chiefs reiterated that there would be no Navy support for the landing. The only direct aid would consist of the San Marcos transiting to "Point Oldsmobile" to rendezvous with the CEF ships and drop off the brigade's landing craft. "Point Oldsmobile" was a point approximately five miles off the coast of the Bay of Pigs where the CEF ships lined up for their approach to the beach. The escort destroyers, after leading the CEF to the
landing area, would withdraw to "Point Packard," a point approximately 125 miles south of the AOA, just north of the Cayman Islands. This point would be the "MODLOC" point, that location where the Navy ships would remain during the operation and the Essex would conduct flight operations.

Prior to the rendezvous with the CEF ships, the commanding officers of the destroyers were directed to intervene only if it would protect the ships from attack or capture. The Navy would open fire only if the CEF were to be attacked. The new ROE authorized the destroyer commanding officers to stay between the convoy and any Cuban craft or suspicious vessels. The commanding officers were authorized to warn the ship to stay out of range. If it failed to do so, the destroyers were directed to "intervene as necessary." 21

Combat air patrol and air controllers received similar instructions as did the surface ships. The combat air patrol could not appear to be protecting the CEF. Other guidelines were similar to previous ROE's with the exception that if the Cuban aircraft ignored repeated warnings and continued to close the force and appeared ready to attack with its bomb bays open the friendly combat air patrol could attack. The other major issue of the directive was that D-Day was postponed again. The new D-Day was set for 17

April.

On 12 April the Essex and its escorts turned south to leave the Gulf of Mexico for its rendezvous with the CEF off the coast of Nicaragua. As of that date the commanding officers in the squadron were directed by Rear Admiral Clark to omit any information dealing with the operation from the deck logs and insert the term "Special Operations" into the ship's position block. Some ships, such as the Murray, maintained course and speed changes, daily ship's routines, replenishment details, and special evolution entries in the deck logs. The Elokomin was not attached to Task Group 81.8 and kept the deck logs intact. The Elokomin refueled every ship in the squadron, including the Essex, and annotated the deck logs accordingly.

This emphasis on security remained paramount during the transit. The White House and CIA insisted on minimizing the American presence in the operation. Each ship was directed to paint over the ship's hull numbers and name. Stack markings were also to be painted over. After considerable cross-deck briefings from Rear Admiral Clark, the commanding officers complied with the directive.

Even as the squadron proceeded to the rendezvous with the CEF, the final plans for the operation were still not

22Ibid., 2-3.
ironed out. The plan differed drastically from the original concept of March 1960. In early April the plan called for limited air strikes on D-2. At the same time a diversionary landing would be conducted in Oriente Province in eastern Cuba. The air strikes would be conducted by Cuban pilots "defecting" from the Cuban Air Force. The defection story was intended to reduce the likelihood of the U.S. being tied to the operation. The D-Day landing would appear to be generated by support from within Cuba. Admiral Burke did not support the defection story or the D-2 air strikes because of the attack's "indecisive nature" and the danger of prematurely alerting Castro's forces. The CIA favored D-Day air strikes instead of the D-2 defection air strike. But "political advantages" proposed by the State Department forced the inclusion of the D-2 air strikes, even though the main emphasis of the operation remained on the D-Day air strikes.24

In a meeting with Kennedy, McNamara, and other National Security Council [NSC] officials on 12 April, Bissell outlined the latest changes to the plan and formulated the final time line. On D-7 the main force would be staged in Puerto Cabezas. Staging would be completed by D-5. On the morning of D-6 the first vessels would sail from Puerto Cabezas. The last vessel was

scheduled to depart in the early morning hours of D -4. On D -2 a limited air strike conducted by "defectors" would be launched from Retalheu. On the night of D -1 the airborne company would be loaded aboard transport aircraft in Retalheu. The main landing on D-Day would be accompanied by another series of air strikes. Two B-26s and a liaison plane would drop propaganda leaflets and then land on the captured air strip. A provisional government would then be established. The CEF ships would return to the beach on the morning of D+1 to complete the discharge of the supplies. On D+7 another diversionary landing was scheduled to take place in Pinar del Río. After the briefing Kennedy was hesitant to give the final go-ahead to the plan. Bissell advised the President that the "Go--No-Go" date for the air strike was 1200 14 April and 1200 16 April for the main landing.25

The Essex battle group arrived off the coast of Nicaragua on 14 April. Each ship was assigned a sector to cover for the final transit of the CEF naval forces to Cuba. The Blagar was the command and control ship of the CEF forces. Other ships in the brigade included the Rio Escondido, Houston, Santa Barbara, Barbara J, Caribe, and Atlántico. The Navy was warned prior to the rendezvous by General Cabell to minimize American visibility. Again, the

25 Ibid., 14.
ROE changed. Actual engagement of Cubans needed to be avoided at all costs until the very last minute and only after it was clear that failure to respond would jeopardize all of the CEF ships. Allowing the Cubans to fire on the CEF ships was now acceptable and the Navy should wait until Castro's forces "honed in for the kill." Every effort should be made to not "blow the operation by overly active intervention." The original concept of the operation was to provide support so that the operation would not fail. The concept was modified so that it could be cancelled at the last minute. The concept was further modified by warning that the mission would be aborted if the Navy had to intervene. The JCS stressed to CINCLANT and each commanding officer in the squadron that the Navy's involvement should not be the reason for aborting the mission:

It is desired to minimize the need to abort the operation, because of U.S. engagement of Castro's ships or aircraft in combat in [the] conduct of [the] protective mission assigned to you.²⁶

Once the Essex and its escorts rendezvoused with the CEF ships, the force headed for Cuba. During the first night of the transit, troops on board the Atlántico were conducting gunnery practice with small arms and .50 caliber machine guns. One man was killed and two were seriously wounded when one of the .50 caliber machine guns fell off its mounting pod and discharged. The Eaton pulled alongside

and the wounded men were transferred for emergency surgery. One man had a serious wound to his stomach and the other had one of his heels shot off. The Navy surgical team on board the Eaton conducted the emergency surgery on the two soldiers prior to evacuating them to Guantanamo.27

Prior to arriving in the objective area, the Eaton picked up one CIA agent and four Cuban UDT personnel. The CIA agent, Grayston Lynch, was supposed to lead the Cuban UDT team on to the beach prior to the invasion. The UDT was used for reconnaissance and beach preparations. The team was to be sent to the beach by the Threadfin, but Lynch's claustrophobia kept him from travelling in a submarine. The team then transferred to the Eaton for further transportation to the beach.28

The operation commenced on D-2, 15 April 1961. Kennedy gave the go-ahead from his retreat at Glen Ora, Virginia. Kennedy wanted to reduce the size and visibility of the operation and directed the CIA to cut the air strike composition from fourteen to eight B-26 bombers. The bombers struck the air fields at Campo Libertad, San Antonio de los Banos, and Santiago de Cuba. Three B-26s attacked Campo Libertad. Two attacked San Antonio de los Banos, while the remaining B-26s struck Santiago de Cuba. Initial

27 Smoot, 6-7.
28 Ibid., 8-9.
battle damage assessments reported that 50 percent of Castro's air force was destroyed at Campo Libertad. Losses at San Antonio de los Banos were reported at 75 percent to 80 percent of the air forces on the ground. The destruction at Santiago de Cuba included two B-26s, one DC-3, one Lodestar, and one T-33. Follow-on photographic studies and interpretation revealed that the initial reports were exaggerated. 29 Castro's air force survived the initial air strike.

A second air strike was scheduled to commence at dawn of D-Day to wipe out the remainder of the Cuban Air Force. Problems and confusion arose which resulted in the second air strike being cancelled. In order to placate the State Department and make the invasion look like it was generated from within Cuba a fake "defector" story was established in which a so-called defecting Cuban Air Force B-26 would flee to Florida following an attack on Castro's installations. The defection was supposed to coincide with the initial air strike. During the initial air strike the B-26 "defector" with Cuban Air Force markings piloted by members of the CEF landed in Miami. But on Saturday, April 14, a genuine defector landed in Jacksonville, Florida. To add to the confusion a B-26 involved in the initial attack crash landed at Key West Naval Station. The "defecting" B-26, piloted by

Captain Mario Zuniga, landed in Miami after a direct flight from Nicaragua. The plane was riddled with bullet holes. Zuniga told reporters that he was a defecting pilot from the Cuban Air Force. The plane was photographed with the Cuban Air Force markings clearly visible and the bullet holes in the engine and fuselage. The "defection" story and photographs were released to the press. Two days earlier, Dr. Raul Roa, Cuban Ambassador to the United Nations, warned that such an attempt to mask U.S. involvement in a planned invasion was imminent. Roa claimed that exile operations sponsored by the U.S. were in progress and Swan Island continued to broadcast anti-Castro propaganda with the assistance of the CIA. Following the initial air strike Roa called for an emergency session of the U.N. Security Council to voice Cuban protests over the U.S.-sponsored aggression.

At the U.N. session, Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, kept uninformed by the State Department and White House officials, defended the "defection" story supported by the statements of the defecting pilot and pictures of the B-26. The CIA committed several blunders which left Stevenson in a position of defending a questionable story. The B-26 in Miami had a plexiglas nose while the Cuban Air Force's B-26s had opaque noses. The tail guns were removed in order to place additional gasoline tanks for the long flight from

---

Nicaragua. Tape covered the gun muzzles and the bomb racks were corroded. Stevenson's account of the defection was easily disputed by Roa.

Stevenson received a briefing on the truth behind the entire operation only after his credibility was placed on the line for having to defend the American position against the charges of the Cuban Ambassador. Stevenson felt shunned by Washington because his credibility in the diplomatic community was disregarded. On Sunday, 16 April, Stevenson was furious that he had been led to push the defection story. He travelled to Washington to object to Kennedy and insisted that any further air strikes be cancelled. Kennedy's foreign policy advisers supported Stevenson's contention to cancel the follow-on air strikes. The cover on American involvement was blown after the initial air strike. China and the Soviet Union warned that the raids threatened world peace and hinted that there might be some sort of intervention in support of Castro. Latin American leaders, although wary of Castro and willing to support attempts to remove him from power, were concerned that they were not informed or consulted on the American decision to


carry out the initial air strike. After receiving a briefing of the day's events from National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy and finally bowing to the pressure of his advisers, Kennedy cancelled the second air strike on the night of 16 April.

Kennedy did not understand the significance of the second air strike and what kind of repercussions it would have if it were allowed to go on or if it were cancelled. As the operation began and progressed, the cancellation of the second air strike and the failure to eliminate Castro's air force would be crucial in the demise of the operation. Also of great magnitude was Kennedy's failure to receive from the JCS a wide-scope of advice on the pros and cons of cancelling the raid. Encircling himself with his closest advisers shielded Kennedy from a full perspective of the potential negative ramifications of his decision.

The Presidential directive to cancel the second air strike was not received in Central America until 2200, 16 April. As originally scheduled, the second air strike was supposed to coincide with the invasion. Had Castro's air force been occupied with the incoming air strike, the


35 Burke interview, 16 September 1988.
invasion force might have had fewer obstacles to encounter in the initial hours of the landing. The Joint Chiefs did not receive word that the second air strike had been cancelled until Monday morning. Admiral Burke was notified when he arrived at the Pentagon War Room early Monday morning after the invasion had already commenced. General Lemnitzer dejectedly said, "Blithely cancelling the most critical operation in the whole campaign without ever telling us or consulting us [was] indicative of the whole operation." Burke was even more upset:

Kennedy didn't want to take military advice because he didn't want to take military action. [Kennedy] was afraid that if the military people got involved [American participation] would grow. It usually does. If you use physical power you have to use the military and it's dangerous. The President wanted to do something that had great effect with no danger. But things don't come that way."

The failure to conduct a second air strike was not the only major blunder as the operation started. The diversionary landing scheduled to coincide with the initial air strike never occurred. The Santa Ana, with a group of 160 men led by Nino Diaz, was supposed to land thirty miles east of Guantanamo to divert attention from the main landing. Once ashore the group would organize guerrilla

---


37 Burke interview, 16 September 1988.
activity in the province. The diversionary landing was supposed to draw Castro's forces to the east and confuse his command. But the plan did not go as originally intended. On the night of 15 April the Santa Ana pulled up to the beach. Diaz' reconnaissance team went ashore. They returned claiming that there were strange lights on the beach and the party of sympathizers arranged to coordinate the landing never appeared. In their efforts the team lost two of the reconnaissance boats. Diaz decided to pull the Santa Ana out to sea and wait until the next night. The following night the operation was aborted because the remaining reconnaissance boats broke down and it took too long to recover them. After the second night's aborted mission the CIA ordered Diaz to proceed to the Bay of Pigs and join the invasion. The general conclusion of those involved in the conduct and evaluation of the operation was that Diaz turned-tail when faced with opposition. His weak leadership was the cause for scrapping an integral part of the operation. Without a diversion Castro had the resources necessary to concentrate his forces in the central landing area.\textsuperscript{38}

The hope that the initial air strike would spur on a general rebellion from within Cuba never materialized. Castro had created an effective organization, the Committee

\textsuperscript{38} Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 22, p. 3.
for the Defense of the Revolution, to police the Cuban populace. Its responsibilities included civil patrols intended to keep an eye on those suspected of being opposed to the revolution. Following the air strike Castro used the intelligence provided by the Committee to round up over 50,000 suspected guerrillas and sympathizers.39

The main invasion began at the Bay of Pigs with little chance of success. There was no air support, diversionary attack, or popular support for the invading forces. At approximately 0100 17 April, the Eaton, accompanied by the Murray, landed the first Cuban UDT team lead by CIA agent Lynch. The Blagar, followed in a column formation at 800 yard intervals by the Caribe, Atlántico, Barbara J, Houston, and Río Escondido, headed to the beach. Red Beach was located at the northern tip of the bay. Blue Beach was located on the eastern side of the bay. Green Beach was located on the eastern seaward side of the bay. Five miles from the beach the San Marcos appeared in the darkness. After rendezvousing with the force, the San Marcos off-loaded the LCU's and LCVPs. The landing craft went alongside the CEF ships to off-load the brigade. After the off-load the San Marcos departed from the objective area. The Barbara J and Houston left the column and proceeded to Red Beach. The Blagar, Caribe, and Río Escondido, moved to

--

within two miles of Blue Beach to send in other UDT teams. The Atlántico headed for Green Beach. The Navy vessels proceeded south to rendezvous with the Essex approximately 125 miles south of the bay. Following the rendezvous they refueled with the Elokomin and assumed duties as escorts for the Essex and stand-by for possible anti-air warfare picket duties for the CEF. The Eaton and Murray proceeded back to the bay after refueling.

With the Eaton and Murray standing off the Bay of Pigs, the landing started after the UDT teams moved ashore. The town of Playa Girón on the bay was well lit. The Cuban UDT team observed men on the beach as they made their way over the coral barriers in the bay. A headlight shined on the incoming team and Lynch fired on it. Lynch radioed back to the Blagar about the incident and passed instructions to expedite the off-loading. Following a short fire fight Blagar moved back among the coral reefs and allowed the first wave of LCVPs into the beach. The first LCVP in the wave struck the coral about 75 yards from the beach. The LCVP lowered its ramp and the troops waded to shore. At 0115 Brigade Commander José Pérez San Román went ashore and

---


commenced unloading troops and supplies. The UDT teams warned the second LCVP of the coral and instructed it to drop its ramp once it touched down and allow the troops to move in. As a result of their wading in the bay, all the hand-held communications gear of the initial landing forces was water-logged and inoperable, another variable that was not considered by the CIA planners. Information had to be passed to the ships using the communications gear of the UDT teams. Lynch returned to the Blagar to coordinate the landing while the UDT's remained on the beach to prepare for the landing of the LCUs. By 0300 the unloading of the troops from the Caribe was completed. Because of the lack of communication from Blue Beach to the surrounding beaches, Atlántico was directed to make its landing at Blue Beach rather than Green Beach. Throughout the early hours of the morning the UDT teams tried to find a way for the LCUs and LCVPs to travel through the coral reefs. Local fisherman showed the way through and the first LCU arrived on Blue Beach at 0600. After the first LCU completed off-loading the second LCU moved in. By daybreak three LCU loads of tanks, trucks, and other vehicles landed on Blue Beach.42

Like the landing at Blue Beach, there was little opposition encountered at Red Beach as the 2nd and 5th Battalions landed. But problems arose when the troops from

---

the Barbara J and Houston encountered considerable difficulty getting ashore. The boats that were supposed to transport the troops to the beach broke down during the start-up prior to the off-loading. Of the nine boats capable of transporting the troops to the beach, only two worked. The 5th Battalion never got ashore because of the boat problems and a lack of initiative from the Brigade Commander on the Houston. As a result, few supplies got ashore. Despite the logistical problems 2nd Battalion secured Playa Girón and captured the local radio station. By daylight the brigade secured Red Beach.43

At 0630 the Cuban Air Force responded. Red Beach was strafed and the Houston was struck by rockets. Fires broke out in Number 1 and Number 3 holds. The crew extinguished the fires and returned to try to continue off-loading the troops, but the Houston was hit by two more rockets from a Cuban T-33. The rockets struck the stern and knocked out the ship's steering. After losing its rudder the Houston lost all steerageway. The ship's master of the Houston decided that it would be safest to beach the ship on the west side of the bay about five miles south of Red Beach. One squad of 2nd Battalion, all of 5th Battalion, and the ship's crew abandoned ship.44

Cuban air strikes were relentless throughout the morning. The CEF was virtually defenseless without air support. Cuban B-26s and T-33s strafed the beaches and brigade ships with no opposition. Castro's air force had total control of the air. The brigade's C-46s and C-54s conducted parachute and supply drops in the midst of a constant barrage of hostile fire without any air support. Fighting on the ground was fierce as the parachutists of 1st Battalion seized the road center of San Blas ten miles northeast of Blue Beach, and the ingress points north and east of the beach head. On Blue Beach the brigade received continuous strafing runs from the T-33s. At 0930 the Rio Escondido was hit and sunk by missiles shot from the Cuban T-33s. It carried ten days of supplies and ammunition, and the communications gear for the brigade. The sinking of the Rio Escondido was a vital tactical loss to the brigade. With depleting ammunition and no communications the brigade faced numerous obstacles in maintaining the beachhead with little likelihood of success. Even though the brigade secured the air strip at Playa Girón and the beaches remained secure, continuous enemy air strikes forced the brigade's ships to sea.45 Without ammunition or logistical support from the ships, the brigade on the beach was in dire straits as Castro increased pressure at the end of D-Day.

After the Rio Escondido and Houston sank, the CIA ordered the ships to head out to sea to a safe haven fifteen miles off the coast that was to be provided by a picket line of Navy destroyers and aircraft from the Essex. The Blagar, Santa Barbara, and Barbara J made their way to the safe haven. The Caribe and Atlántico continued past the rendezvous. The Eaton and Murray chased the retreating ships for approximately 130 miles before they threatened to open fire on the CEF ships to make them stop. Colonel J. F. Mallard, USMC, the CIA Communications Officer on the Essex, and Captain Crutchfield urged the masters of the Caribe and Atlántico to return. The masters refused to return to the beach without a guarantee that there would be air cover for the forces. There was talk of mutiny among the crews of the Caribe and Atlántico. After heated discussions with Mallard and Crutchfield, the ships turned around and headed back to the safe haven.

In order to prevent the unrestricted Cuban air strikes on the beach, it was essential to eliminate or neutralize Castro's air forces. Kennedy agreed to allow the CIA to coordinate a bombing run consisting of two waves of three B-26s to hit as many air fields as possible with fragmentation bombs. At 1615 of D-Day the order was given to launch the B-26s. Unfortunately the bombing runs failed because the B-26s encountered considerable cloud cover and haze and the
lights surrounding the targets were blacked out.\textsuperscript{46}

Late on the night of D-Day and early D+1, the \textit{Atlântico} returned to the AOA. The \textit{Caribe} was too far away from the beach and never played a major role in the remainder of the operation. The \textit{Atlântico} off-loaded its cargo to the LCUs for the run into the beach during the night time and was supposed to return before daylight. The off-loading took longer than expected and the LCUs could not get to the beach before daylight. The CIA in Washington directed the \textit{Atlântico} to keep the LCUs alongside and not try to make the run to the beach. The CIA attempted to get supplies and ammunition to the beach by CEF air drops. The probability of sufficiently rearming the brigade was low. The air drops were conducted by four C-54s and two C-46s. Only five drops were successful. Some drops landed in the jungle. Others landed in the water.\textsuperscript{47}

The \textit{Eaton} and \textit{Murray} remained outside the coral reefs during the operation and watched with futility as the brigade was pushed back by the Cuban Army and Air Force. The ROE from the transit remained in effect and there was little the Navy could do to assist the forces. On the morning of D-Day the JCS ordered Dennison and Clark to be


\textsuperscript{47}Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 27, p. 11.
prepared to provide unmarked combat air patrols for the CEF shipping outside Cuban territorial waters. The combat air patrols were not authorized to provide protection inside the AOA. Clark was directed to create a picket line of early warning ships no closer than thirty miles from the coast.48 At 0550 local time, the JCS stressed to Clark that the early warning destroyers could not approach closer than the thirty-mile limit and should be spread in a wide-spaced picket line. Again, the use of combat air patrol in support of the CEF was not authorized.49

The sinking of the Río Escondido and Houston changed the complexity of the operation and the Navy's involvement. By 1030 the Navy had already established the safe haven with combat air patrol protection for the Cuban ships fifteen miles off the coast. In the same message directing the establishing of the safe haven CINCLANT received further confusing modifications to the ROE. No carrier operations were allowed closer than fifty miles from the coast. No U.S. aircraft could come within fifteen miles of the coast. There could be no more than four aircraft on station at a time. Hot pursuit was not allowed over Cuban territory. U.S. aircraft could not close a Cuban aircraft unless it was preparing to attack. If any enemy aircraft were shot down,

49Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 29, Tab F, "JCS Message 994222 to CINCLANT/CTG 81.8, 171050ZAPR61."
every effort should be made to hide U.S. involvement.50 The order from Washington baffled Dennison. It told him exactly how to establish the safe haven, how many destroyers to use, and how to use the destroyers. Until that time Admiral Burke gave Dennison a great amount of flexibility and leeway to "lean" on his orders. Dennison passed this flexibility to Clark. The orders from the White House took away a great amount of decision-making capability at the lower levels of command. In a phone call to General Lemnitzer, Dennison said, "I've gotten a good many orders in my life, but this is a strange one." Lemnitzer did not understand what Dennison was talking about. Dennison explained, "Well the last paragraph in it says that the Joint Chiefs of Staff interpret this to mean, set up a safe haven. This is the first order I ever got from somebody who found it necessary to interpret his own orders." Lemnitzer responded, "Where did you get this directive?" Dennison replied, "I got it from you." Lemnitzer said, "Who do you think wrote it?" Dennison replied, "You did." Lemnitzer answered, "No, I didn't. That order was written at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue." At this point Dennison was infuriated, "Well you can tell 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue that I'm not going to do it that way. I'll do what they want done, but I'll use the forces that I think are necessary. They don't know what's

going on as much as I do."\textsuperscript{51} As expected, the Navy's involvement increased. The Navy received directions to make preparations to come to the aid of the CIA.

At 0400 on D+1, 18 April, Castro's forces opened fire on the brigade in the San Blas area north of the bay with artillery. Communications still did not exist between Blue Beach and the outer perimeter of the beachhead. Officer couriers were used to shuttle messages from Blue Beach to the battle areas. The artillery fire continued and the troops were forced to withdraw towards Blue Beach. The troops on Red Beach encountered a similar constant barrage of artillery fire throughout the day. In the early morning tanks were seen approaching Blue Beach. By 0730 the worsening situation forced the troops on Red Beach to move to Blue Beach. The troop movement to Blue Beach was completed by 1000. They were given a few hours rest and sent back to Red Beach. At 0824 Blue Beach came under attack from twelve tanks and four jet aircraft. Ammunition dwindled. At 1010 Red Beach was overrun. The force consolidated on Blue Beach. The Cuban artillery and air strikes remained relentless throughout the brigade's retreat.\textsuperscript{52} The heat of battle created a problem in the flow of information to Washington and Norfolk. Burke and

\textsuperscript{51}Dennison, 351-52.

\textsuperscript{52}Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 29, Tab G, "JCS Message 99427 to CINCLANT, 172035ZAPR61."
Dennison were not receiving accurate up-to-the-minute information on the operation. Kennedy authorized the Navy to use unmarked aircraft to conduct photo and visual reconnaissance. The President directed the unmarked reconnaissance planes to protect themselves only if attacked. Burke urged Dennison and Clark to keep sending updates and good intelligence to Washington. Burke wanted CINCLANT amphibious officers to review the intelligence reports to ensure their accuracy. The Essex closed the coast on the afternoon of D+1 to launch the reconnaissance flights.\(^5\) At 1600 the Essex reported that a long line of tanks and trucks were approaching Blue Beach from the east. At 2000 the CIA asked San Román, the Brigade Commander, if he wished to prepare to evacuate the brigade. He refused to evacuate and said, "I will not be evacuated. We will fight to the end here if we have to."\(^5\)

The air battle over the beach head raged throughout D+1. American contract pilots were used to supplement the Cuban pilots who were either too tired or refused to fly. On the afternoon of D+1 six sorties were flown from Nicaragua against the column of tanks approaching Blue Beach along the coastal road from the north. Napalm bombs and

\(^5\)Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 29, Tab H, "JCS Message 994309 to CINCLANT/CTG 81.8, 181837ZAPR61."

rockets were used to check the Cuban advancement. Castro's forces responded quickly to the changing threat and modified their advances accordingly. The Cubans slowly encircled Blue Beach by the end of D+1.5

Admiral Burke grew increasingly frustrated with the Cuban onslaught of the CEF. Burke requested that the President authorize the use of naval gunfire support to lay down a barrage of fire on the approaching tanks. Kennedy asked Burke, "What if Castro's forces return the fire and hit the destroyers?" Burke responded, "Then we'll knock hell out of them!" Kennedy worried that the U.S. would then be directly involved. Burke responded, "We are involved, sir. Goddammit, Mr. President, we can not let those boys be slaughtered out there!" Kennedy realized that the operation was failing miserably. Red Beach was lost.

Continuous air strikes and strafing of Blue Beach made the brigade's predicament untenable. Kennedy authorized the JCS to prepare unmarked aircraft for combat use. The number of airplanes necessary to complete the job was left to the discretion of Admiral Dennison and Admiral Clark. Burke ordered units from Amphibious Squadron Two located in the vicinity of Guantanamo, to steam towards the Bay of Pigs.

---

Taylor Report, Part I, Memorandum 1, p. 23.


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
In addition to the preparation of combat aircraft, Burke ordered Clark to prepare unmarked naval boats for possible use in evacuation operations. 57

The last opportunity to get ammunition to the beach was between the late hours of D+1 and early hours of D+2. A C-54 landed at the air strip at Playa Girón to drop off ammunition and pick up a wounded pilot. The JCS informed CINCLANT that unmarked U.S. Air Force C-130s might be used for air drops. 58 The C-130 air drops never materialized. Even if they did take place, it would have been too little too late. Cuban forces closed off the beach and prepared for the final push to the bay.

On the morning of D+2, 19 April, Kennedy sought an opportunity to alleviate the pressure on the beachhead. At the request of the CIA, Kennedy directed the JCS to furnish air cover consisting of six unmarked aircraft over the CEF forces between 0630 and 0730 to protect against air attacks from the Cuban air force. The Navy was directed to provide air cover and nothing else. It could not strike at any Cuban forces on the ground. There could be no air combat, only protection of the CEF Air Force if attacked. The JCS directive ordered Clark to make sure the pilots carried as little identification as possible. If a Navy plane was shot

57 Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 29, Tab I, "JCS Message 994317 to CINCLANT/CTG 81.8, 181947ZAPR61."

and required ditching, the pilots were ordered to ditch at
sea. Air drops were scheduled using C-46s between the hours
the Navy air protection was supposed to be on station.
While the air drops were in progress, CEF B-26s were
scheduled to attack Cuban tanks and artillery positions.
Clark also received notification that he should prepare to
conduct evacuation operations. If so, he should move units
from Amphibious Squadron Two about thirty miles from the
beach by 1300 that day. If needed, evacuations were
scheduled to commence at 1700. Rescue boats had to be
unmarked with any identification that could tie the U.S. to
the operation removed. The original directive from the
White House ordered the men of the rescue boats to wear
civilian clothes. In the event that the men were captured,
there could be no tie to the American naval involvement.
Dennison felt that the evacuation plan designed by the White
House showed no acknowledgement of the rights of the sailors
involved. Without identification or names, the men, if
captured by the Cubans, could be treated as spies. The men
would not be entitled to the protection guaranteed to
prisoner-of-wars under the Geneva Convention. Dennison
disregarded the directive and instructed the crews of the
boat to remain in dungarees and carry no identification. If
the evacuation was to be conducted using the Navy ships, air
cover was authorized to protect the landing craft.59

Everything from the unmarked Navy jets to the unmarked Navy rescue craft crewed by American sailors with no identification made the entire evacuation process confusing and difficult for the participants to implement. There was no doubt that the U.S. was heavily involved. It is very difficult to hide American Navy ships inside the bay trying to conduct rescue operations.

That morning there was an error in determining the time the CEF would conduct the air strike. The strike was scheduled for 0630 Cuban time. The CEF Air Force arrived an hour early. Even though the Essex launched immediately, the CEF already made its strikes against the beachhead and faced considerable Cuban air opposition.60 If the Essex had launched on time, the effectiveness of the strike so late in the operation would have been doubtful. Castro's forces had already closed in on the beach.

The situation on the beachhead was hopeless for the brigade. Castro's air force controlled the air while his tanks proceeded to the beach with little opposition. The CIA decided to prepare for the evacuation of the force. There would be no more ammunition drops. The CIA reasoned

---


that three days of ammunition was taken ashore on D-Day and air drops were conducted on that night. Additional air drops were made during the night of D+1 and early morning hours of D+2. CIA leaders felt that it was a hopeless task to ask for destroyer or air support. Without overt U.S. support, the loss of the CEF ships would be inevitable. Based on these assumptions, they felt justified in calling off the resupply effort by sea with the exception of one last air drop on D+2.61

American volunteer pilots continued to be used throughout the last hours of the operation. A B-26 carrying four American pilots was shot down early on Wednesday morning, D+2. The four Americans, Wade C. Gray, Thomas Ray, Riley Schlamberger, and Lee Barker, had been involved since the initial air strike. There was no way the U.S. government could deny involvement in the operation once the Americans were shot down.62

The troops in the San Bias region began a general retreat to Blue Beach after encountering consecutive air attacks and tank and artillery fires from the north and east. They could not stand the onslaught without ammunition, supplies, and air cover. At 1432, the Brigade


Commander sent the last message to Washington, "Am destroying all equipment and communications. I have nothing left to fight with. Am taking to the woods. I cannot wait for you." Shortly after nightfall the resistance ended.63

Prior to the cessation of fighting, the Navy began the evacuation operation. Burke directed Dennison to send in two destroyers to Blue Beach to check on the possibility of evacuating the CEF. Reconnaissance flights over the beach were authorized. Active air to air combat was allowed but no attacks against ground forces were authorized.64

Dennison passed on the directions to Clark who coordinated the rescue operation through Crutchfield on the Eaton. The Eaton and Murray pulled into the bay to check for survivors. After hearing that CEF soldiers were jumping into the bay to swim to the ships, Burke ordered Dennison and Clark to evacuate the force on Blue Beach to the best of their ability. In the message to Dennison, Burke expressed concern about getting forces off the beach. Burke passed to Dennison, "We are extremely reluctant to become engaged but as long as we have some prospects of saving significant numbers of people to make hazards worthwhile, save the people." If the Eaton and Murray were fired on by Cuban tanks or artillery, authority was given to protect

---


64Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 29, Tab K, "JCS Message 994382 to CINCLANT/CSTG 81.8, 190557ZAPR61."
themselves while on the "humanitarian mission." If there were large numbers that could be recovered, Clark was ordered to inform the JCS as soon as possible so that they could announce that the U.S. would assist in the evacuation.65

While conducting the evacuation JCS warned CINCLANT to standby to provide fighter support for the rescue effort. CINCLANT directed the commanding officer of the Key West Naval Air Station to prepare six unmarked F-3Hs for possible use against Cuba. Amphibious Squadron Two was directed to get its ship's landing craft ready for the evacuation. The USS Independence (CVA 62) task force, enroute to the Caribbean, was ordered to speed up and stand off Guantanamo and wait for further orders. The ships in Guantanamo sortied and prepared for action if necessary.66

On the night of 19 April the Eaton moved to the top of the bay, almost running aground in the process. Crutchfield directed two junior officers from the Eaton to take the motor whale boat and a rubber raft and go to the western swampy side of the bay and pick up as many troops as the boats could handle. The officers took a signalman, radioman, and boatswain mate with them to the beach. They were armed with rifles and .45 caliber pistols. They were

65Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 29, Tab L, "JCS Message 994392 to CINCLANT/CTG 81.8, 191812ZAPR61."

66Dennison, 354.
ordered not to leave the boat but the waves were so choppy in the bay that it was impossible to get people into the boats. They decided to land the boats. The first group of refugees included Gray Lynch, the CIA agent who participated in the initial landing. A total of seventeen survivors were picked up in two nights of rescue operations.\textsuperscript{67}

The rescue operations continued into Thursday night, 20 April. The CIA operations officers on the \textit{Blagar} and \textit{Barbara J}, Lynch and William "Rip" Robertson, had been rescued off the beach and transferred to the \textit{Essex} with Crutchfield for debriefings with Admiral Clark. After the meeting, Lynch, Robertson, and UDT personnel were sent back to the beach in the motor whale boat of the \textit{Eaton} to check on the validity of the information regarding survivors still hiding in the bushes. The rescuers used loud speakers and searched the mangrove swamps on the western side of the bay. With protection from the Navy destroyers and air cover, Castro's helicopters stood off and observed the rescue process. It was difficult for the rescuers to convince the survivors to come out of the swamps because of the helicopters flying over the bay. When they left the bushes, they were transferred to the \textit{Eaton} and then later to the \textit{Essex}.\textsuperscript{68}

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{67}Smoot, 15-20.

\textsuperscript{68}Taylor Report, Part III, Annex 27, pp. 7-8.
The Eaton, unaccompanied, pulled in as close to the shore as possible. Cuban tanks opened fire and bracketed the Eaton. The Eaton moved out of the bay to get out of the range of Castro's guns. Late Thursday night the Eaton returned and towed several amphibious barges out of the bay and transferred them to ships of Amphibious Squadron Two, USS Chilton (APA 38) and USS Thuban (AKA 19).69

Upon direction of Kennedy, Burke directed Clark to take charge of the CEF and escort the ships to Vieques. Continued destroyer patrols off Blue Beach were authorized to search for possible survivors. In what Crutchfield called "one of the strangest" orders he had ever received, Burke gave the commanding officer of the Eaton permission to ground his ship without fear of any repercussions if it would make the mission easier. The Eaton was directed to stay within sight of land during the night and outside of Cuban guns during the day. Crutchfield was directed to repeat the patrols on 21 April.70 In retrospect, the order to allow the commanding officer to ground his ship was not strange at all. Burke felt that at that stage in the operation something as drastic as grounding the rescue ship might facilitate the mission. Burke was willing to use military force to rescue the ship and suppress any Cuban

69Smoot, 14.

threat. The primary concern was the evacuation of any survivors. If the Cubans decided to open fire on the American forces, Burke and Dennison were prepared to respond militarily. According to Burke, he was willing to support the ships trying to rescue the survivors:

There is nothing worse than to be put out on a limb and realize that nobody gives a damn about whether you come back or not. I would have sent people in after [them]. You've got to do that. You can't send people into battle and say sacrifice yourself. Even if you have to risk putting the nation at war. Or you don't do a damn thing.71

The Eaton and Murray remained in the vicinity until Saturday, April 22. The ships of Task Group 81.8 began arriving in Norfolk on 30 April with no fanfare. The crews were directed to refrain from talking about the operation to anyone. The cloak of secrecy was still in place and remains, with some, to this day.72

71Burke interview, 16 September 1988.
72Krisel interview, 31 August 1988.
CHAPTER FOUR

PROFILES IN TIMIDITY OR WEAKNESS IN STRENGTH?

The remaining CEF ships left Cuba and sailed to Vieques with their Navy escorts. Contingencies such as the lack of air superiority and logistical reinforcements played major roles in the failure of the mission. The Navy, having warned of such contingencies, was asked to come to the rescue of the operation after there was little chance of reviving it. The only thing that the White House could do was pull back the forces and admit to the defeat. Castro glowed because he successfully gave the U.S. a black eye and bloody nose.

After the debacle at the Bay of Pigs Kennedy quickly accepted the blame for the failure of the operation. His willingness to accept responsibility diverted a great deal of negative attention away from the White House. In conversations with his closest advisers Kennedy said, "There's an old saying that victory has a hundred fathers and defeat is an orphan." But behind closed doors Kennedy was enraged by the perceived lack of support he received from the CIA and JCS. There were several holdovers from the

Eisenhower Administration, especially in the CIA and JCS. Kennedy could handle the CIA. He played with the idea of appointing his brother, Robert F. Kennedy, to relieve Dulles. The military posed a greater problem to Kennedy. Admiral Burke was a hero to Kennedy dating back to World War II. The Bay of Pigs taught Kennedy an important lesson. Kennedy claimed that he would never again be in awe of the military.\textsuperscript{2} In review of the Bay of Pigs operation, it seems unfair to lay the blame on the CIA and JCS. In fact the White House was just as responsible as any other party.

Kennedy asked former Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell Taylor to come out of retirement and head a committee to investigate the causes of the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Other members of the committee included the Robert F. Kennedy, Allen Dulles, and Admiral Burke. The Taylor Committee reviewed evidence, listened to testimony, and drew a conclusion for submission to the President.

The Taylor Committee concluded that the causes of the failure at the Bay of Pigs were widespread. The sinking of the \textit{Río Escondido} and \textit{Houston} created a drastic shortage of ammunition. The \textit{Río Escondido} held ten days of reserve ammunition. The \textit{Houston} should have been able to off-load prior to being sunk, but the problems created by the failure of the landing craft to operate and the general lethargy of

\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 289-90.
the 5th Battalion were difficult to overcome. The majority of the forces' ammunition was concentrated on those two ships. Constant air attacks by the Cuban Air Force caused delays in the transfer of supplies and replenishment to the beach because the CEF ships were forced to head out to sea to avoid being hit by enemy missiles. The retreat of the Atlántico and Caribe forced undue delays in the transfer of supplies to the landing force.3

The Taylor Committee found that the Cuban Air Force maintained air superiority because the initial air strike failed to destroy the airplanes on the ground, especially the T-33s. The need for secrecy placed restraints on the anti-Castro air force. The restraints included using B-26s as combat aircraft because the B-26 was widely distributed throughout the region, and therefore no clear ties could be drawn to the U.S. In order to remain covert, the operation was limited to pre-invasion air strikes launched from non-U.S. controlled air fields. Because the CEF had to use air strips far from the objective area, pilot fatigue forced the use of American contract pilots. Restrictions on the use of certain types of ammunition, especially napalm, hindered the force's ability to neutralize and destroy its targets.

because of the need to remain covert.

The most important conclusion of the Taylor Report concerned the cancellation of the second air strike. The ramifications ran deep. The cancellation wiped out the possibility of eliminating Castro's air force. The report concluded that "the cancellation seems to have resulted partly from [the] failure to make the air strike plan extremely clear in advance to the President and Secretary of State." The Taylor Report concluded that the planners were guilty of not forcefully informing the President of the military repercussions of a last minute cancellation. Because of its structure the Executive Branch was not organizationally prepared to handle such a vast paramilitary operation. The report stressed that there was not a single authority capable of coordinating the actions of the CIA, Department of Defense, State Department, and the U.S. Information Agency, short of the President. The report found that "top level direction was given through ad hoc meetings of senior officials without consideration of operational plans in writing and with no arrangement for recording conclusions and [the] decisions reached."4

Based on their findings the committee noted that the exiles fought well and inflicted considerable losses on the Cuban forces. Contrary to the view that control of the air

4Taylor Report, Part I, Memorandum 2, pp. 2-4.
would be vital for the brigade to survive, the Cubans' numerical superiority reduced the probability of success to nil. The limited numbers of B-26 pilots flying from Nicaragua made continuous air support tenuous. The option of inserting guerrilla forces to undermine Castro's strength was nearly impossible because of Castro's encirclement and eventual forcing of the brigade back to the beachhead. Under these conditions the beachhead could not have survived without Cuban uprisings or overt American support. Although the guerrilla option could not succeed, with control of the air, the brigade could have been evacuated by sea and air.  

The limitations on the operation reduced the probability of success. It was impossible for such a small landing force to occupy a thirty-six mile beachhead. With no air support and a limited number of pilots, the CEF air force had little chance of succeeding. Even though the intent was to infiltrate the jungles and head into the Escambray Mountains if the operation failed, planners were guilty of overlooking the fact that the Zapata region primarily consisted of swamps and marshes and was located over ninety miles from the mountains. The President and other senior officials were advised that it would be an easy transition from an invasion force to guerrilla force. The JCS, for their part, reviewed the Zapata Plan and gave it a

---

lukewarm approval, although they preferred the Trinidad Plan. The Taylor Report concluded that this point was never brought up to administration officials. As a body the JCS reviewed the plan piecemeal and only within a limited context. Differing opinions among the JCS should have been brought to the attention of the President.6

The Taylor Committee found that an operation such as the Bay of Pigs was an example of a paramilitary operation suited to the Cold War and that the country should be prepared to engage in it. If the country participated in a paramilitary operation, it must do so with a high probability of success. The report stated,

> Such operations should be planned and executed by a governmental mechanism capable of bringing into play, in addition to military and covert techniques, all other forces, political, economic, ideological, and intelligence, which can contribute to its success. No such mechanism presently exists but should be created to plan, coordinate and further a national Cold War strategy capable of involving paramilitary operations.7

The committee recommended the establishment of a Strategic Resource Group supported by a Cold War Indication Center which allowed the focusing the resources on the objectives of the Cold War.8 The establishment of such a group would have effectively taken all paramilitary plans and operations

---

7Taylor Report, Part I, Memorandum 3, p. 3.
out of the hands of the CIA and JCS and would have placed them in the hands of a centralized command responding directly to the President.

The Taylor Report is a historical document that gives a detailed chronology of the Bay of Pigs operation. Some of its findings are questionable. The committee was established to explain to the President why the Bay of Pigs operation failed. Opinions tended to hide the true responsibility for the failure of the operation. According to Commander George Mitchell, aide to Admiral Burke who attended the Taylor Committee sessions, "It was a complete whitewash." Mitchell claimed that the writing was on the wall prior to the committee's convening. It was not intended to reveal the entire story, only what senior administration officials wanted to hear. Mitchell stated that the Attorney General was regularly calling the President to report on the meetings and the direction they were heading.9 Burke understood the rationale behind the Attorney General's actions:

Bobby Kennedy was not going to let his big brother take any blame at all. He was protecting his brother. That's natural. He was very ardent about it and very good at it.10

9Captain George Mitchell, USN (Ret), interview by author, 31 August 1988, telephone, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

10Admiral Arleigh Burke, USN (Ret), interview by author, 16 September 1988, tape recording, Fairfax, Virginia.
In an interview with journalist Hanson Baldwin, the Attorney General tried to divert the blame away from the President towards the JCS. He stated, "Have you looked at the role of the JCS in this? They're the ones to blame. You ought to investigate that."  

Burke was so sure that the committee was trying to blame the Navy that he directed the Navy Judge Advocate General to prepare a defense that he could have in hand if he needed it. Admiral Burke did not want the Navy to receive blame for what it did or did not do.  

The Taylor Report fails to stress several major problems of the operation. There was a shortage of ammunition because the Rio Escondido and Houston were sunk by Cuban missiles on D-Day. The initial air strike was supposed to destroy the Cuban Air Force. The planned second strike dealt with the possibility of having to attack those aircraft not destroyed in the initial strike. The President's decision to cancel the second air strike allowed the Cuban Air Force to maintain air superiority over the beachhead. The retreat of the Atlántico and Caribe was due to the continued air strikes and lack of air support in their defense. Burke questioned the administration's

---

1Hanson W. Baldwin, Interview by Dr. John P. Mason, Jr., September 1978, Oral History Collection, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, Md., 679.

12Burke interview, 16 September 1988.
understanding of the threat of war and the ramifications of their actions:

War is risky. The bigger the operation, the bigger the risks. It's harder to accomplish. [You] can't have an operation without danger.13

Even if the operation failed, with air support on hand, the guerrillas might have been able to escape to the hills and then on to the mountains.

Throughout the planning phases of the operation, Kennedy was informed and advised of the nature of the air strikes. Throughout March and April, Bissell and Dulles briefed the President and Secretary of State of the various options available in the operation. The failure of the military and civilian planners "forcefully" to argue their case to the President concerning the repercussions of cancelling the second air strike begs the question: how "forceful" does one have to be when continually briefing the President? Burke and Bissell readily admitted that they didn't "pound the desk" to voice their objections over the cancellation of the second air strike. Even if they had, their input would have been limited. By the end of D-Day, information getting to and from the President was filtered by his closest advisers. Little if any military advice reached the President. Kennedy made the mistake of "trying to ride two horses." He was faced with arguments for and

13Ibid.
against the invasion. Those opposed to Castro argued that
the invasion must take place and not fail. Opponents of the
invasion argued that "masked aggression" was immoral. The
problem was that the plan had little likelihood of success
and there was little chance of keeping U.S. involvement
covered. Kennedy tried to compromise. In a life and death
situation like the Bay of Pigs there should be no
compromises. If there were any doubts, Kennedy should have
stopped the invasion before it got underway.

In retrospect the CIA, JCS, the Navy, and the White
House should have shared responsibility for the failure.
The CIA underestimated the actual strength of Castro's
regime and forces. Had the beachhead been secured and had
Castro been unable to drive the invading force off the beach
with his regime intact, a stalemate might have occurred. In
that case the OAS would have been called in to act as an
intermediary and supervise negotiations. The operation did
not materialize as planned. Castro had more support from
the populace and military than the CIA expected. The CIA
found that it was difficult to conduct such a large
amphibious campaign without support from within and without

14 Victor Lasky, JFK: The Man and the Myth (New York:
Macmillan, 1963), 516.
Cuba. The CIA's failure to plan for such contingencies was crucial to the operation's downfall. The CIA concocted the idea, planned it, reviewed it, evaluated it, and executed it without the complete support of other governmental agencies. The CIA's double role as intelligence gatherer and policy-maker hampered a truly objective point of view. There was no evidence of an internal review of the plan. The CIA "fell in love with the plan and ceased to think critically of it."\(^{16}\)

The JCS the Navy can be faulted for not adequately informing the President of the pros and cons of the various plans. Although asked to review the plans, the JCS remained in a position of observing another government agency's operation. Admiral Burke and the Navy allowed themselves to become so intent on removing Castro from power that they ignored the shortcomings in order to carry out the operation. The JCS might have reviewed and made recommendations that would have made the plan work. As the chief military advisers to the President, that was their responsibility. The Joint Chiefs should have taken the plan "down to the deck plates" to expose every weakness. A risky operation like the Bay of Pigs deserved scrupulous detailed

\(^{15}\text{Richard Bissell, Interview by Ed Edwin, 5 June 1967, Oral History Research Office, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York, 26-31.}\)

\(^{16}\text{Karl Meyer and Tad Szulc, The Cuban Invasion: The Chronicle of Disaster (New York: Praeger, 1962), 104.}\)
examination. Had specific details been raised, questions and discussions would have created a greater flow of communications between the interested parties.17 But the Joint Chiefs were blinded by the possibility of removing Castro from power. Like the CIA, the JCS lost their objectivity because of their desire to remove Castro.

A share of the blame has to be placed on Kennedy. The blame does not rest entirely on Kennedy because of his decision to cancel the second air strike. Rather, Kennedy was at fault because of his failure to understand the true uses and limitations of power. Admiral Burke claimed that Kennedy used power like it was a never-ending game.18 His insistence that the CIA conduct the operation in complete secrecy devoid of any overt U.S. involvement lacked sound judgment. Once military force is employed, its origins cannot be hidden by painting the hull numbers of ships, or using unmarked Navy airplanes. If a President uses force to seek a political objective, he must understand the political and military ramifications of his actions. The Navy could have made the plan work, but then Kennedy would have had no way to hide American complicity in the operation. In hindsight, it might have made more political sense to back

17 Jeffrey Graham Barlow, "President John F. Kennedy and his Joint Chiefs of Staff," (Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1981), 177.
18 Burke interview, 16 September 1988.
out before the operation began. Instead, Kennedy put
American prestige on the line by allowing the operation to
go ahead without the necessary military support. Kennedy
should have considered these options prior to giving the go-
ahead for the operation. Burke was correct in believing
that Kennedy did not understand the capabilities of force in
accomplishing a foreign policy objective. The appearance
of implied strength and the failure to take advantage of
that strength created a lack of credibility and a strategic
political failure for the U.S. at the Bay of Pigs.

The Navy's participation in the Bay of Pigs has been
faulted. But in reality the Navy had been put into a
position of trying to make a poor plan work. Throughout the
operation Admiral Burke's and Dennison's hands were tied by
the White House. Burke was critical of those in positions
of responsibility who faulted the Navy even though he
thought the Navy did everything it could make the plan
succeed:

I don't think the Navy could have done anything better
under the circumstances. Of course there is always
room for improvement. There are always people who
should have been told that weren't. Always people who
were incompetent in the line of responsibility and
line of action that didn't do what they should have
done. [It] always happens. And always will. That's
why there's multiple resources in the military for one
man to pick up the ball if another man fails. He does
it automatically without anybody saying, 'It's your
turn now.' They do that. That's why the military is
more apt to be successful in operations that require

\[\text{Ibid.}\]
innovation and decisions on the spot than [are] civilians. Civilians are not used to taking responsibility for something they aren't directly responsible for.20

Secrecy and security were more important than the conduct of the mission. Strategically, Burke and Dennison had strong reasons for wanting Castro out of Cuba. The administration should have relied on military force coordinated by the JCS and the Navy, not the CIA, if it wanted to seek the political objective of removing Castro from power. It was worth the use of American force to eradicate a strategic threat from Cuba while suffering short-term political setbacks. The Navy had the opportunity to try to drive Castro out of power, but there was a breakdown in the relationship between military leaders and policy makers. The policy makers in the administration were at fault for failing to heed the advice of the military. As a result, Castro's regime was solidified even more after the Bay of Pigs. Kennedy's failure to support the invasion at the Bay of Pigs gave Castro a strong dose of credibility in the eyes of the world. The fact remains that Castro remains in power and Cuba appears to be firmly entrenched in the communist camp for the indefinite future.

20Ibid.
BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

When I began this project the first warning I received was that there was very little information available. The possibility of "spinning my wheels" was always possible. The warnings were correct. There is very little declassified information available concerning the Bay of Pigs operation, especially from the Navy. In addition to the limitations on the amount of printed information available, there are some people who still refuse to talk about the operation in fear of breaching security. Some people talked to me on the grounds that I not publish what they told me. I agreed. But in order to do a concise perspective of the American naval involvement, I had to back track from what I was told in confidence and try to verify through other open sources. To a certain extent, I was successful.

My primary source of information was the Taylor Committee Report. The report was the foundation of my study. The report was still classified in many places, but, through my interviews, I was able to piece together much of the operation. Admiral Arleigh Burke, USN (Ret), provided insightful information from the perspective of the Joint
Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Captain Lionel Krisel, USN (Ret), Admiral Burke's historian of the Bay of Pigs operation, provided information concerning the details of the operation and those involved. His thorough and concise information filled many gaps in the operation cloaked in security.

Others involved in the operation were willing to discuss their participation. Admiral Robert R. Crutchfield, USN (Ret), the on-scene commander at Bay of Pigs, provided invaluable information that is not available in any references. Commander Jose Perez, USN (Ret), was a B-26 pilot for the Cuban Expeditionary Force (CEF). During the Bay of Pigs operation he was shot down by Cuban anti-air defense fire while conducting a strike on D-Day. Following the operation he came to the United States and joined the Navy. Commander Perez described the training aspects of the operation followed by the air strikes and invasion. Captain James W. Griffin, USN (Ret), was the Commanding Officer of the USS Threadfin (SS 410). The Threadfin's missions were cloaked in secrecy and Captain Griffin was reluctant to discuss any of them. Yet he did acknowledge that the Threadfin was involved in the operation.

My most interesting interview, ironically, was the least valuable. Mr. Jack Pfeifer, until last year, was Historian for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). He is currently involved in a lengthy legal dispute with the CIA concerning information he researched while historian at the
Agency. The CIA has refused to release any information concerning the operation. His value, although not directly pertaining to my study, centered around the various CIA actions taken prior to, during, and after the failed operation.

The Oral History Collection at the United States Naval Institute was an invaluable source of information. Dr. John P. Mason, Jr., and Paul Stillwell's concise and in-depth interviews provided information on the operation from not only the Navy's point of view, such as Admiral Horatio Rivero, Admiral Alfred Ward and Admiral William Mack, but also the press, such as the Oral History of news reporter Hanson W. Baldwin. The Oral History Collection provided information that could not be attained through personal interviews.

Pieces of the operation that could not be attained from interviews was attained through the various deck logs of the ships involved. Unfortunately some deck logs do not exist. Of all the ships in the operation, only the deck log of the USS Essex (CVA 9) is missing from the Record Center of the National Archives. Based on information gathered from the staff at the National Archives, the CIA made an attempt to clear all files dealing with the operation. All paperwork and documents concerning the operation were supposed to be turned over to Kennedy Administration officials and the CIA. Some institutions were less than
willing to agree. The deck logs that still remain have the ship's position block erased and the words "Special Operations" written in it. Yet, the USS Elokomin (AO 55) deck logs clearly state their geographical position and the names of the ships that it refueled which made it easy to pinpoint the location and composition of the task force.

Much of the information from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and John F. Kennedy Library is still closed. Of the information open to researchers, some of Eisenhower's personal papers, the Taylor Report, and McGeorge Bundy's Papers were the most valuable. The sensitive classification of the majority of the information dealing with the Bay of Pigs and the relationship between the U.S. and Cuba is the primary reason for the lack of information available.

Secondary sources provided a good background of information, pro and con. The doting histories of the Kennedy Administration, Kennedy by Theodore Sorenson, and A Thousand Days, by Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., gave detailed accountings of the Kennedy days. As insider's accounts of the Kennedy Administration, these works tended to be biased in favor of their subject. Sorenson and Schlesinger's works balance well Victor Lasky's JFK: The Man and the Myth. Lasky tried to peel through the Kennedy mystique to give a differing opinion of the President and his Administration. Although differing in nature, these sources were examples of the secondary sources that were abundant and that provided a
well-rounded scope of information.

Sources ranging from personal interviews, oral histories, and government documents, to books, magazines, and newspapers were instrumental in the support of my thesis.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Documents


135

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.

_______. "Two Years of Castro." Office of Naval Intelligence Review 16, no. 5 (May 1961): 253-60.


Interviews and Memoirs


Perez, Jose, Commander, USN (Ret). Interview by author, 27 April 1988. Virginia Beach, Virginia. Telephone interview.


Secondary Sources

Books


Barlow, Jeffrey Graham. "President John F. Kennedy and His Joint Chiefs of Staff." Ph.D. diss., University of South Carolina, 1981.


**Articles**


Vandenbroucke, Lucien S. "Decision to Land at the Bay of Pigs." *Political Science Quarterly* 99, no. 3 (Fall 1984): 471-492.

Newspaper Reports


