



BOB CONSIDINE

The Bay of Pigs

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NEW YORK — Messrs. Schlesinger and Sorensen, who hover somewhere between the status of historians and grave-robbars, have given us a glut of what it was like being close to John Fitzgerald Kennedy during the Bay of Pigs disaster.

For sums that will enrich them far beyond their stipend as employees of the late President, they lay before a fascinated if sometimes outraged reader what purports to be the ultimate word on JFK's rock-bottom hour. Whether they intended or not, each gives the impression that the late President could not have pulled through his ordeal if he had not had them in constant attendance and holding his hand as the debacle reached its sorriest point.

At that point, neither of these chroniclers was there. As the attempt to unseat Castro collapsed, the President was alone with his young friend Ray O'Connell, New York public relations man. Ray, who had broken his leg in a skiing mishap, happened to be in Washington at the crucial hour and, having called Evelyn Lincoln to ask if he could see the President was told to come over to the White House immediately.

"Sit down," Kennedy said as Ray entered. He helped lift Ray's casted leg to the stool. "I want you to be able to go back to New York and tell everybody I'm earning my salary."

The two reminisced about earlier adventures for a time. Then Capt. Tazewell Shepard, the President's naval aide, came into the office and handed JFK a message.

The President read it and handed it to O'Connell. O'Connell scanned it swiftly.

He is not sure today who signed it but remembers the gist of it: The longer the invasion ships remained in the Bay of Pigs the greater chance that they would be hit or associated with the U.S. role in the attempted coup. The memo sought the President's advice.

The President took the piece of paper back from O'Connell, looked at Capt. Shepard and said, "How would you like to be on that beach and see your ships withdrawing? Leave them there."

The only other person who came into the President's study during that crucial time, O'Connell recalls, was press secretary Pierre Salinger—who was in and out in a hurry.

"Do you think Castro will be crazy enough to kill those people he's rounding up?" the President asked O'Connell. O'Connell guessed that Castro would.

"WHAT DO YOU think we ought to do?" JFK asked his friend. O'Connell was about to suggest that the U.S. blockade Cuba (which would have prevented the missile build-up that followed) but Mrs. Lincoln poked her head in the office at that moment. She said there was a phone call from Earl E. T. Smith, a good Kennedy friend who had been President Eisenhower's Ambassador to Cuba. The President took the call, spoke briefly, then accepted another call, this one from his father. Then he put in a call for Allen Dulles.

"I'm going to take the blame for this," he said into his phone when that connection was made. "But don't forget the advice you gave me." **END**

(Hear Bob Considine on KGO Radio (810) Monday through Friday, 5:50 p.m.)