

THE CIA ENTERS THE DAYS OF CAMELOT

THE JOHN F. KENNEDY YEARS

One of the bitterest electoral battles of the century was fought in 1960, when U.S. Senator John Fitzgerald Kennedy of Massachusetts was elected president over the incumbent vice president, Richard Milhous Nixon.

For Nixon and his longtime backers¹ in and out of government, the defeat on November 8 was staggering and quite unexpected. They had had many plans for the next four years, and their dreams had been deflated by that "half-a-vote per precinct" loss.

¹ Shortly after World War II, Nixon answered a want ad from a Los Angeles newspaper which sought a man who would run for political office. Nixon ran for Congress with the help of these anonymous backers and was elected. These people con-

Part IX in a Series

on the Central

Intelligence Agency

by L. Fletcher Prouty

tinued to support him through the ups and downs of his political career. Nixon has acknowledged that he had these backers; exactly who they were is another question.

Years later, Nixon put his thoughts down on paper in one of the most unusual articles ever to appear before the millions of readers of *The Reader's Digest*, under the title, "Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy." The article appeared in the November 1964 issue, apparently written some months before its publication.

Nixon began with these remarkable sentences:

"On April 19, 1959, I met for the first and only time the man who was to be the major foreign policy issue of the 1960 presidential campaign; who was destined to be a hero in the warped mind of Lee Harvey Oswald, President Kennedy's

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assassin; and who in 1964 is still a major campaign issue.

"The man, of course, was Fidel Castro."

Nixon had been Dwight Eisenhower's vice president during the 1950s, and before that, going back to 1947, he had served in both the House and the Senate. He knew Washington, the government, and the great industrial and banking combines that are so closely enmeshed with the government as well as any man could know them. In this amazing article, he looked back over the hectic earlier years and linked the four factors which were uppermost in this intense man's mind:

- a) The 1960 election;
- b) Fidel Castro;
- c) The death of the president, John F. Kennedy; and

d) The assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald.

In this article, he said almost nothing about the growing warfare in Southeast Asia, even though he knew very well that it had been under way since 1945. By 1964, it had run its escalative course — a course he had done much to encourage — for two full decades, under the direction of the CIA.

At the time he wrote the article, however, he was preoccupied with Castro and Kennedy. With the 20/20 vision of hindsight, his choice of topics was suspicious and timely.

Nixon's article was published just one month after the release of the 26-volume report of the Warren Commission, which made public the utterly incredible finding that Lee Harvey Oswald, alone, had been responsible for the death of John F. Kennedy. Since Nixon's article was actually written before the Warren Commission report was issued, he had scooped that report with his positioning of Lee Harvey Oswald as "President Kennedy's assassin."

It is worth noting that a member of the Warren Commission also scooped the public issuance of the report. Gerald R. Ford's article, "Piecing Together the Evidence," appeared in *Life* magazine on October 2, 1964 — before the Warren report came out.

These two men — subsequently presidents — for some reason found it necessary to put on the record, as soon as they could, their support of the theory that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin.

This allegation was not true. Lee Harvey Oswald was *not* a lone assassin.



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Richard Nixon covered up the fact that he was in Dallas on the day, and at the exact time, that JFK was shot.

Why did both of these men feel compelled to say that he was? To whom were these public figures beholden?

It is now established that Nixon was in Dallas on the day, and at the exact time, that JFK was shot — 12:30 p.m., Central Standard Time, November 22, 1963².

"For Nixon and his longtime backers in and out of government, the defeat of November 8 [1960] was staggering and quite unexpected."

Oddly, he omitted that fact in his article.

In fact, Nixon covered up the fact that he had been in Dallas with an erroneous recollection which he included in a later paragraph of the *Reader's Digest* article. Why did Richard Nixon not want anyone to know that he was actually in Dallas at

² Nixon was with a top executive of the Pepsi-Cola Company. Nixon was a legal counsel to that corporation. That top executive's son has told of Nixon's presence in Dallas at the time of the assassination, with his father. The Pepsi-Cola executive later confirmed his son's account of the story. The son of another Pepsi-Cola executive was in Dallas at that time and had dinner with Jack Ruby, Oswald's killer, the night before JFK was murdered.

that time?

Why did he so categorically pronounce Oswald to be the killer, before the specious evidence of the Warren Commission had been published? Did he have other information that he has been concealing to this day? It is uncanny that he so positively linked Cuba, Castro, Oswald and Kennedy in this unusual article, while at the same time completely omitting other important events. They were his priority: he must have had his reasons.

Nowhere was Nixon's bias more evident than in another passage from the same *Reader's Digest* article:

"Fidel Castro, therefore, proved to be the most momentous figure in John F. Kennedy's life," wrote Nixon.

This was Nixon's emphasis. Would Kennedy have said the same? As this series on the CIA and its role in the warfare in Southeast Asia arrives at the threshold of the Kennedy era, it is important to realize that JFK's ascendance to power was a much more ominous transition than many have understood. An analysis of Nixon's unusual comments will make this clear.

Castro and the Cuban situation in 1960 was the major foreign policy issue during the Nixon-Kennedy campaign, principally because Nixon had made it so. On March 17, 1960, President Eisenhower had approved a rather modest CIA proposal for "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime"³ developed by the CIA and endorsed by the Special Group⁴ consisting of a deputy undersecretary of state, a deputy secretary of defense, the director of central intelligence, and the special assistant to the president for national security affairs. As an ex-officio member, Vice President Nixon was almost always present at these meetings.

This proposal was the beginning of what later became known as the Bay of Pigs operation.

Nixon not only knew of the president's approval but, as vice president, he was one of the prime movers of that top-secret CIA project. As he wrote, "I was one of only three members of the president's cabinet who had been briefed on it, and . . . had been the strongest . . . advocate for setting up and supporting such a

³ Most references to this CIA proposal are taken from the post-Bay of Pigs Taylor Report, which was actually the Maxwell Taylor "Letter to the President," of June 13, 1961, plus the author's personal files.

⁴ This was known as the "5412/2 Committee."

program.”

During the campaign, this created a cruel dilemma for Nixon. Both Democratic and Republican campaign headquarters knew, as they approached the fourth television debate, that the presidential race was neck and neck. Nixon, with his eyes on Kennedy, wrote:

“I was faced with a heads-he-wins, tails-I-lose proposition. If in the TV debate I were to reveal the existence of the [CIA's Cuban] training program . . . I would pull the rug out from under Kennedy's position. But, if I did so, the project would be doomed. . . . I had only one choice: to protect the security of the program. . . .”

JFK, unrestrained by such top secret security considerations, advocated “that the United States openly aid anti-Castro forces inside and outside Cuba.” The Kennedy attack had been released in time to appear in the afternoon papers, before the television debate went on the air. In this release the headlines said, “Kennedy Advocates U.S. Intervention in Cuba; Calls For Aid to Rebel Forces in Cuba.”

Each candidate was battling with all guns blazing; as in love and war, there are no limits in a political contest. Nixon's assessment of Kennedy's wiles fell short. He wrote, “In a speech before the American Legion Convention . . . I had gained the initiative on the issue. . . .” It is hard to believe the shrewd Nixon still believed that in 1964. He should have known that after that very same American Legion convention, he had easily been outfoxed by Jack Kennedy.

What actually happened was that immediately after the American Legion convention the inside, top-ranking ring-leaders of the Cuban exile community, some of whom had been on the platform with Nixon at that same convention, flew directly to Washington for a strategy meeting. Where did that meeting take place? Right in the private confines of the Capitol Hill office of none other than Senator John Kennedy. Kennedy had stolen a march on Nixon. He made himself totally aware of all that was going on in that top secret CIA program and when the time came to fire the big guns, during the fourth television debate, he did.

His handling of this major issue was so effective that he won the television debate handily, and then won the closest presidential election in history over the out-gunned Nixon.

At that time, Nixon may have taken a page from the Kennedy clan motto, “Don't get mad, get even.”

The bold counterattack began. Nixon



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Cuban premier Fidel Castro.

and his cronies would get even. Most old-line bureaucrats know that the time to make huge gains is that “lame duck” period between the election and the inauguration of the new president. At no time is this more opportune than at the end of an eight-year cycle.

“Castro and the Cuban situation in 1960 was the major foreign policy issue during the Nixon-Kennedy campaign, principally because Nixon had made it so.”

The CIA and its bureaucratic allies in key government positions made some telling moves which, in retrospect, show how astutely they had read the presidential tea leaves.

When Eisenhower had approved the CIA “Cuban exile” proposal, he had one thing in mind. Since the Castro takeover on January 1, 1959, tens of thousands of Cubans had fled the island. In Ike's view, the best way to provide for these refugees, at least those of military age, was to put them in the army or in an army-type environment where they would get food, clothing and shelter while they became oriented to the American way of life. After that they could go it on their own.

Thus, he approved a plan to put thousands of them into an “army” training program — and no more.

The CIA, however, saw this as an opportunity to go a bit further. Their March 17, 1960, proposal⁵ was divided into four parts, one of which was:

“d. The development of a paramilitary force outside of Cuba for future guerrilla action.”

This was later expanded by the CIA to read:

“d. Preparations have already been made for the development of an adequate paramilitary force outside of Cuba, together with mechanisms for the necessary support of covert military operations on the island. Initially a cadre of leaders will be recruited after careful screening and trained as paramilitary instructors. In a second phase a number of paramilitary cadres will be trained at secure locations outside of the United States so as to be available for immediate deployment into Cuba to organize, train and lead resistance forces recruited there both before and after the establishment of one or more active centers of resistance. The creation of this capability will require a minimum of six months and probably closer to eight. In the meantime, a limited air capability to re-supply and for infiltration and exfiltration already exists under CIA control and can be rather easily expanded if and when the situation requires. Within two months it is hoped to parallel this with a small air supply capability under deep cover as a commercial operation in another country.”

This is precisely how the CIA presented its proposal. This is the way such clandestine operations begin. At the time of approval, the president believed the concept of paramilitary action, as described, was to be limited to the recruitment of a cadre of Cuban exile leaders and to the training of a number of paramilitary cadres of exiles for subsequent use as guerrillas in Cuba. Let no one be so

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⁵ This very modest proposal was submitted to the National Security Council by CIA Director Allen Dulles. It was a plan for the recruitment of Cubans into a military-type organization for training purposes. At that point, the CIA had plans for very little, if any, operational activities in Cuba. From this modest beginning, the agency, spurred on by certain former senior Cuban officials, began to formulate plans for air drops and over-the-beach landings of small groups of Cuban exiles, as well as air drops of arms and ammunition for anti-Castro groups on the island.

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mised to believe President Eisenhower approved an invasion by a handful of Cuban refugees — not the man who had led the massive and successful Normandy invasion on June 6, 1944.

At the same time this Cuban exile program was being initiated, the CIA and its allies in the military had prepared a curriculum⁶ to provide the student in training with background information on Cold War techniques. A portion of this training described what is meant when the CIA uses the term "paramilitary":

"Paramilitary Organizations: We Americans are not very well acquainted with this type of organization because we have not experienced it in our own country. It resembles nothing so much as a private army. The members accept at least some measure of discipline, and have military organization, and may carry light weapons. In Germany in the 1920s and early 1930s the parties of the right and the communists had such organizations with membership in the hundreds of thousands. It is readily apparent what a force this can be in the political life of a country, particularly if the paramilitary forces are armed, when the supremacy of the army itself may be threatened."

Following formal authorization from the White House Special Group, which included Nixon, the CIA set out to recruit 300 Cuban exiles for covert training outside the United States. As with most such programs, including those in the news today, the CIA began by coming to the military for support. An inactive U.S. military base in Panama, Fort Gulick, was selected as the initial training site. The CIA put together a small unit to reactivate the base and to provide the highly specialized paramilitary training that the agency employs for similar units at certain military-covered facilities in the states, such as the one at Camp Peary, Virginia.

In the beginning, the CIA was unable to obtain properly qualified military doc-



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The CIA jockeyed for a stronger position as President Dwight Eisenhower's second term drew to a close.

tors for Fort Gulick and therefore came to the Military Support office in the Headquarters, U.S. Air Force.⁷

This action marked the formal entry of the U.S. military into the "Bay of Pigs" program.

To keep all of this in perspective, and to understand how significantly all of this prior planning impacted later upon the administration of John F. Kennedy, it must be understood that these events were taking place while President Eisenhower was winding up his eight-year term in office.

Eisenhower had high hopes for his "Crusade for Peace," based upon a successful summit conference in Paris during May 1960, and for a post-summit invitation for a grand visit to Moscow with Khrushchev. The visit to the Soviet Union was to cap his many triumphant tours to other countries where the always-popular Ike had drawn crowds of more than one million people. In preparation for the summit and its theme of peace and harmony, the White House had

directed all aerial surveillance activity ("over-flights") of communist territory to cease until further notice and had ordered that no U.S. military personnel were to become involved in any combat activities, covert or otherwise.

Because of these restrictions, the support of this Cuban exile training facility began cautiously. Aircraft that had been ordered for a Cuban exile air force were being processed under the terms of an "Air Force" contract. In the Far East, an enormous over-flight program that had been delivering vital food, medicine, weapons and ammunition to the Khamba tribesmen (who were battling Chinese communist forces) in the far Himalayas of Tibet was curtailed. Yet on May 1, 1960, a U-2 spy plane flown by Francis Gary Powers left Pakistan on a straight-line over-flight of the Soviet Union en route to Bodo, Norway.

The U-2 came down in Sverdlovsk only halfway to its goal. Powers, alive and well, was captured by the Soviets. This untimely incident caused the cancellation of the summit conference and the denial of an invitation to President Eisenhower to visit Moscow. It ended his dream of the Crusade for Peace.

The same man who was in charge of the Cuban exile program and the vast over-flight program that supported the Khambas, Richard Bissell, formerly a Harvard professor, was the man who ran the U-2 program for the CIA and sent the Powers flight over the Soviet Union on May 1, 1960.

Through this crescendo of events, the CIA kept the pressure on in Vietnam⁸ and moved the Cuban exile project along. On August 18, 1960, the president and a few members of his cabinet were briefed by the CIA on these developments, and a budget of \$13 million was approved. Additionally, military personnel and equipment were made available for the CIA's use.

Although the plan seemed to be the same, those familiar with day-to-day developments noted a change. A number of Cuban over-flights had been flown, usually in Air America⁹ C-46 or C-54

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⁶ The above is taken from a U.S. Army Civil Affairs School lesson guide for U.S. and foreign military personnel. It or a similar guide was used for the training and indoctrination of the cadre of Cuban exile leaders. It is important to note what the U.S. Army teaches on this subject, and to consider its applicability in this and other countries. This same document was used widely to train and indoctrinate the Special Forces "Green Berets" in Vietnam.

⁷ This active office was concealed in the Plans Directorate and was known simply as "Team B." Its official duty was "to provide Air Force support of the clandestine operations of the CIA." This was accomplished secretly, on a worldwide basis. The author was directed, in 1955, to establish that office and was its chief from 1955 to 1960, when he was transferred to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. In his capacity as head of the Military Support office, the author himself went to Fort Gulick with CIA agents.

⁸ See earlier articles in this series, particularly Parts V through VIII.

⁹ Air America was a major CIA air transport proprietary company, with headquarters in Taiwan and operations all over the world. It was a Delaware-chartered corporation and had about 100 cover names under which it could do business, in order to conceal its identity and its connection with the CIA.

AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS



President Eisenhower's hopes for a "Crusade for Peace" were dashed when the CIA — against Ike's direct order — sent a U-2 spy plane, similar to the one shown here, on a flight over the Soviet Union.

Francis Gary Powers, pilot of the ill-fated U-2.

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transport aircraft. The crews were Cuban exiles. These were scheduled to hit selected drop-zone targets at night based on signals from the ground. Few, if any, were ever successful, and reports reaching the Pentagon were that "Castro was getting a lot of good equipment free."

There were a number of over-the-beach landings from U.S. Navy ships which targeted sugar refineries, petroleum storage sites and other prime targets for sabotage. These met with some success; but many exile teams disappeared and were never heard from again. The CIA and Cuban exile leaders either underestimated or did not believe in the total effectiveness of Castro's "block" system¹⁰. They could not get through its surveillance.

Faced with the reality of this situation, certain key planners of the CIA took advantage of the lame-duck administration to change the approved concept for the Cuban paramilitary operations.

By midsummer, moves were designed to build a Cuban exile strike force to land on the Cuban coast. The 300-man opera-

tion had grown to a 3,000-man invasion.

By June 1960, the CIA obtained a number of B-26 aircraft, each modified with eight .50-caliber aerial-type machine guns in the nose section. Those aircraft were aerodynamically "cleaner," with less

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antennas and protrusions to slow them down, and hence faster than the original World War II model. They packed tremendous firepower. Many of these B-26s had been used by the CIA in the aborted Indonesian rebellion of 1958¹¹ and were moved from Far East hideaways for use by the Cuban exiles.

The CIA had already consolidated its

rather considerable covert air apparatus from air bases in Europe and Asia to a semi-secret facility on Eglin Air Force Base, Florida.

While this air force was being assembled at a modification facility in Arizona and an operations base in Florida, the CIA made a deal with Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, president of Guatemala, and his close friend, Roberto Alejo Arzu, a wealthy landowner, to begin the improvement of a small airport at Retalhuleu in western Guatemala.

By summer 1960, construction was well under way, around-the-clock, under the management of a "non-existent" firm known as the Cornwall-Thompson Company. Before long, a large assembly of C-46s and C-54s from Air America, along with the B-26s, took shape, and all further training was keyed to the landing operation on Cuban soil.

While the Cuban program was being escalated, the CIA and its allies in the Pentagon took advantage of the political hiatus. They had so many covert programs under way and so many more planned that they had to make some arrangements for an enormous increase in available manpower. The 5412/2 Committee had approved the limited use of military personnel for Cuban training. That approval opened the door to other cases, and other clandestine operations. This is what CIA Director Allen Dulles used to call "peacetime operations," meaning clandestine operations. Today the Reagan administration — which includes some of the same undercover

¹⁰ The block system, an old form of control, "pacification" and surveillance made infamous during the Hungarian revolt of 1956, divides an area into blocks. Each block is under the absolute control of a leader, who knows where everyone is on that block. He uses children and schoolteachers, wives, shop foremen and all other sources to gain total, 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week surveillance. No one

could penetrate the Cuban system either from air-drop entry or by beach landing, and no one could evade it from the inside. The effectiveness of this system neutralized the exile group's ability to penetrate into, or to support, political guerrillas.

¹¹ See Part VIII in this series, FREEDOM, March 1986.

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operatives from the 1950s — calls these clandestine operations “low-intensity conflicts” by “special operations forces.”

It is traditional that the uniformed armed forces of one nation are not to be used in or against another nation, except in time of war. This generally means in time of a *declared* war. Up to 1960, the U.S. government honored this tradition, with very few exceptions for specific, limited actions.

Nations, and nationalism, survive because of the existence of the fragile structure called sovereignty. True sovereignty must be absolute. If sovereignty is not recognized by the entire family of nations, large and small, rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped, then nationalism will crumble, and the larger nations will devour smaller ones before the last act, when those left begin to devour each other, like two scorpions in a bottle.

To be practical, we must admit that true sovereignty no longer exists. No nation today is free and absolutely sovereign. To be truly sovereign, a state must in no way be limited by external authority or influence. The United States is under the influence of the Soviet Union every day, and vice versa. The fact of the existence of the H-bomb and its uncontrollable power denies sovereignty to all nations. This fact has eroded sovereignty to the point that a small country, such as Israel, boldly destroys a nuclear power plant in Iraq and a revolutionary camp in Tunisia, and demolishes Lebanon at will. In today's matrix of nations, the power-center controllers, or the High Cabal¹², are attempting to structure something to take the place of nationalism and sovereignty.

Thus we have the increasing use of military forces in non-military roles, as in the indiscriminate carpet-bombing of defenseless Cambodia. The CIA has been the leading edge of this change and by 1960, during the transition period, it saw a way to make elements of the military available, under their operational con-

¹² As described by the late R. Buckminster Fuller in his book, *The Critical Path*, these are “vastly ambitious individuals who [have] become so effectively powerful because of their ability to remain invisible while operating behind the national scenery.”

Winston Churchill used the term High Cabal in recognition of this group's existence and its supremacy.

UPI/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS



In a betrayal by the CIA, the tactical plan President John F. Kennedy had approved for the Bay of Pigs was sabotaged from the inside.

trol, for the ever-growing size and frequency of “covert” operations. Of course in this context the whole idea of “covert,” “clandestine,” or “secret” operations becomes ridiculous. Such operations cannot be kept secret; they are *called* “secret” as a means of disciplining the media and any possible whistleblowers.

The first step in this move for military support was for the CIA to join with the Office of Special Operations (OSO) in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) to completely rebuild and enlarge the Army's Special Forces units — the Green Berets of Vietnam in the 1960s.

The army's Special Forces units had been allowed to decline, and morale had deteriorated at Fort Bragg. Then a sudden change occurred.

Colonel Edward G. Lansdale, who had returned from Vietnam after his job as chief of the Saigon Military Mission (a CIA cover unit described in earlier parts of this series) and confidant of President Ngo Dinh Diem, was assigned to the Pentagon in the OSO/OSD. He had found a way to bypass the conventional U.S. Army channels to reinvigorate the Special Forces with the help of the CIA and friends in the Defense and State departments. He won approval to activate a new Special Forces school and to increase the size of the Special Forces center at Fort Bragg for U.S. troops and

selected personnel from foreign armies.

He could not be sure of top-level U.S. Army approval and support for his bold plan, so he went around them. While everyone else was occupied with the final days of the presidential campaign, Lansdale, his longtime associate Colonel Sam Wilson, later to be the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA), and this writer flew to the U.S. Army Civil Affairs School at Fort Gordon, Georgia, for a meeting with its commanding officer. During this meeting, Lansdale arranged to get a copy of the curriculum of that school, which — in the space of one week — was converted by Lansdale, Wilson and this writer into a “Cold War” curriculum for use at the new Special Forces center.

With the same brusque action, Lansdale, the CIA, and their Special Forces associates rushed this curriculum into print, filled the instructor positions with all available hands, augmented by CIA personnel, and flew planeloads of foreign students to Fort Bragg. Opening day was scheduled shortly after, and the then deputy secretary of defense, James Douglas, filling in for the secretary, Thomas Gates, cut the ribbon for the center that is now known as the Army Special Forces John F. Kennedy Center. The president elect, ironically, had nothing to do with it.

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This ceremonial opening was so hurried that "instructors" were reading and "teaching" from lesson guides they had never seen before, and the foreign "students" were so few that they were rushed from one classroom to another while Deputy Secretary Douglas was being shown Special Forces weapons, e.g., the long bow, the crossbow, flechettes¹³, and so forth.

All of this could never have happened any other way, or at any other time. This hastily thrown together scenario marked the beginning of the saga of the Green Berets in the early 1960s, when U.S. Army forces were in Vietnam under the operational control of the CIA.

Not to be outdone during this crucial lame-duck period, Bissell of the CIA made more moves.

The departing cabinet members on the 5412/2 Committee would no longer have any interest in the covert Cuban exile training program. They would be glad to forget the many failures that had been discussed repeatedly as the Cuban exiles, time after time, did not accomplish their projected goals in Cuba.

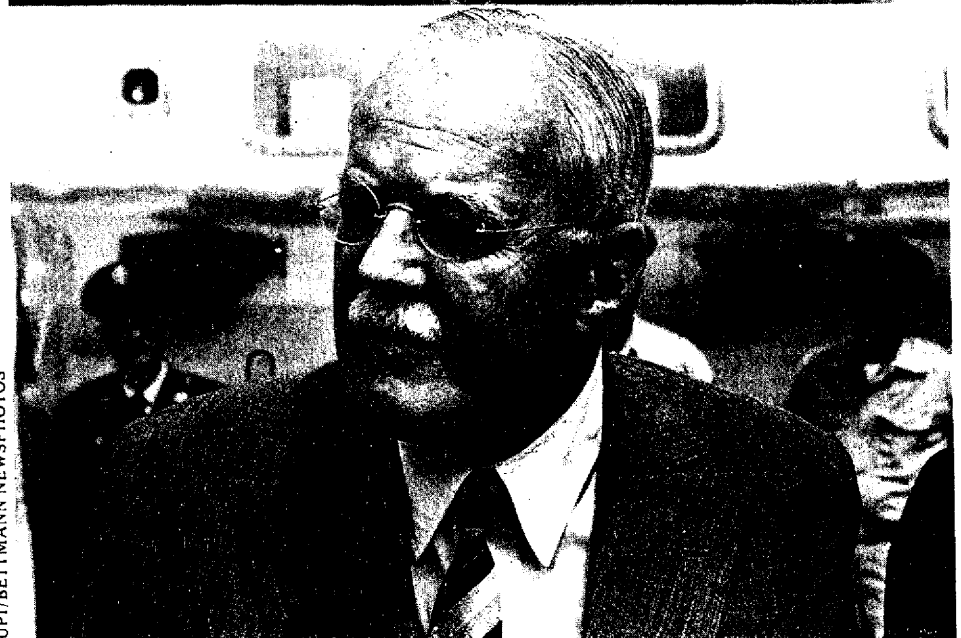
On November 4, 1960, with the election set to take place four days later, the CIA dispatched a cable to the Bay of Pigs project officer in Guatemala, directing a reduction of the guerrilla training and the introduction of conventional training of an amphibious and airborne assault force. This was named Operation Trinidad, after the beach on which the invaders were originally supposed to land.

The CIA made this major change on their own, without specific approval. The CIA leaders knew that if Nixon had become president he would have gone along with their decision, since he had been the most vehement anti-Castro agitator at the top level¹⁴.

Once Allen Dulles had been reappointed as CIA director by president-elect

¹³ Flechettes are small missiles or darts which can be individually fired from a tube much like a drinking straw. These generally have no recoil, make little or no noise, have a high terminal velocity, and are hard to detect after they have entered a person's body.

¹⁴ Even this scheme had its uncertainties. Many CIA old-timers hated Nixon. When the CIA-directed rebellion against Sukarno in Indonesia in 1958 failed so miserably, it was Nixon who demanded, and got, the immediate dismissal of that World War II-era OSS hero, Frank Wisner, and the dispersal of Wisner's Far East staff. Wisner had been chief of that operation, working out of Singapore. The "old boy" network never got over that move by Nixon. Wisner committed suicide some years later.



UPI/BETTMANN NEWSPHOTOS

When things were hottest during the Bay of Pigs invasion, it turned out that CIA Director Allen W. Dulles had left town.

Kennedy, they figured they could go ahead with their plans.

With Dulles continuing as head of the CIA, agency leaders were confident they could work with, or around, Kennedy, and they contrived to lock him in to as many programs as possible; the agency's momentum accelerated during the post-election period. Dulles briefed the president-elect on November 29, 1960, and the new plan was formally presented to the outgoing 5412/2 Committee on December 8. There is no record of Special Group approval on December 8, but the CIA continued with Operation Trinidad. This plan was discussed with members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff between January 11 and 19, 1961. This writer was the last one to brief the outgoing secretary of defense on the subject of Trinidad the last day he was in office, while a major blizzard raged over Washington.

It can be stated emphatically that the final tactical plan for the invasion that was approved by President Kennedy on Sunday, April 16, at about 1:45 p.m. could well have succeeded. It was based fundamentally on the prior use of Cuban exile-piloted B-26s to destroy, totally, Castro's small combat air force. The first attack had been made on April 15 and had destroyed most of those planes.

The concept was identical to that of the 1956 British-French clandestine attack

on Nasser's air force in Egypt, which destroyed his entire combat air force and made it possible for General Moshe Dayan of Israel to dash across the Sinai to the Suez Canal without attacks from the air.

This tactical plan for the Cuban brigade was sabotaged from the inside, however, after JFK had approved it that Sunday afternoon.

The beach at the Bay of Pigs had been selected on purpose, because there was an adequate airstrip there, suitable for B-26 operations against Castro's ground forces. It was isolated and could be reached only via causeways or the narrow beach itself.

The brigade could take over the airstrip and B-26s, operating from close in, could have overwhelmed any reasonable force approaching via the causeways. But this excellent tactical plan was entirely based upon the total destruction of Castro's remaining combat-capable aircraft. Thus a second attack was scheduled: a dawn air strike *before* the brigade hit the beach and alerted Castro's air defenses. Those three aircraft that had been away from the first-strike target had to be destroyed before the invaders landed. Kennedy understood that when he made the decision to proceed with the April 18 plan.

The second phase of the plan, now called Operation Zapata, included the

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establishment of a Cuban government-in-exile following the invasion — on the beach, if necessary — after the brigade had held Cuban soil for at least 72 hours.

It had been planned that the Cuban government-in-exile would call upon the Organization of American States (OAS) for support of the brigade immediately and that the United States, with nominal OAS assistance, would sustain the brigade and its new government.

With this show of strength and determination, the CIA believed that tens of thousands of Cubans would rise to join the brigade and revolt against Castro. In short order he would either be killed, flee or surrender. This was the plan; but between the time of Kennedy's approval at 1:45 p.m. Sunday and the time for the release of the B-26s from the Hidden Valley base at Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, the vital dawn air strike to destroy Castro's three remaining T-33 jets was called off.¹⁵

As a result of that top-level cancellation, those three T-33 jets, scarcely to be considered combat aircraft, yet ever so much better in aerial combat than the slow B-26, shot down 16 brigade B-26s, sank the supply ships offshore and raked the beach with heavy gunfire. They, and they alone, were responsible for Castro's victory over the brigade. That cancellation of the dawn air strike had created Kennedy's defeat, and brought the whole burden down on the shoulders of the new president.

¹⁵ The author had an unusual insider's view of these developments. He knew of Kennedy's approval early Sunday afternoon, April 16. He knew the ships had been at sea and that forces would hit the beach at dawn on Monday, April 17. He had heard that three T-33s had not been destroyed in the April 15 air strike when all of the other combat aircraft had been hit. He knew that the U-2 flight on Saturday had located the jet T-33s at Santiago; and he knew that the CIA operator at Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, had prepared four B-26s for the dawn air strike "coming in from the East with the sun at their backs and in the eyes of the defenders, if any."

At about 1 a.m., April 17, the author's home phone rang with a call from Nicaragua. It was an old friend, the CIA commander at Puerto Cabezas. He was upset. He told him the dawn air strike had been delayed. He said, "Anything after a 2 a.m. departure will destroy the whole plan, because our B-26s will not be able to arrive before sunrise. The brigade will hit the beach at dawn. This will alert the air defenses and the T-33s, and we'll lose our targets on the ground."

He urged the author to call the Operation Zapata office and, using OSO/OSD authority, demand the

There was much about that sabotaged plan which damaged Kennedy so drastically that would remind one of the sabotaged flight of Gary Powers' U-2 spy plane over the Soviet Union on May 1, 1960, which destroyed Eisenhower's Crusade for Peace.

It just happened that some of the same men, in high places, were in charge of both projects, and that Nixon had worked closely with all of them. We have wondered why, in 1964, Nixon believed that Castro had "become the most momentous figure in John F. Kennedy's life," and why he believed that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin and that Castro had been his hero. These are good questions. This, as described, was how Castro came into JFK's life: the Oswald scenario came

"It can be stated emphatically that the final tactical plan for the invasion that was approved by President Kennedy on Sunday, April 16, at about 1:45 p.m. could well have succeeded."

later.

Who caused the failure of the brigade's invasion of Cuba, and how did it happen?

A most unusual article, "The Brigade's My Fault," appeared on the Op Ed page of *The New York Times*, on October 23, 1979. It contained an elaborate Freudian

immediate release of the B-26s. The author could hear the planes' engines running in the background of the telephone conversation. He suggested, "If I get on my bike and ride across the field, the Cubans will take off without orders." Later, they both wished he had done that, and that they had gone. The entire Bay of Pigs operation came that close to success.

After that call, the author reached the CIA's Zapata office and suggested they release the B-26s "on Kennedy's orders" or the whole effort would fail. They told him "the situation is in the hands of [the president's national security assistant, McGeorge] Bundy, [Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Charles P.] Cabell and [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk." At that time, the author did not know that Allen Dulles had left town.

They all knew that if the B-26s in Nicaragua did not leave very soon, the entire plan would collapse.

They learned later someone else had called Hidden Valley to tell them not to worry; other B-26s would knock out the T-33s. This is one reason so many B-26s were shot down. The pilots believed there would be no air opposition, least of all T-33s.

confession. Its author was McGeorge Bundy, the former national security assistant to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

In this article he wrote about the "brigade in Cuba" and "the famous brigade, a unit of about 2,600 men." He revealed his top-level views of the intelligence community of that time, writing, "But in fact, like other people, the intelligence community usually had more on its plate than it can handle."

He recalled all those major programs the CIA had under full steam when the Kennedy administration came to Washington in 1961. Then he wrote, "So I have to consider that there was a staff failure — which means mostly me." He leaves no question about it: as he writes after 18 years of contemplation, "The Brigade's My Fault." Kennedy had never placed the fault for the brigade on anyone but himself, as Eisenhower had done with the U-2 affair.

On April 22, 1961, JFK had directed General Maxwell Taylor, in association with Attorney General Robert Kennedy¹⁶, Admiral Arleigh Burke and Allen Dulles, to give him a report on the "Immediate Causes of Failure of Operation Zapata," i.e., the Bay of Pigs. That elaborate report by Taylor was submitted to JFK on June 13, 1961.

The existence of that report has been denied by those principals and was one of the best kept secrets of the Kennedy years¹⁷.

However, during 1979, when Bundy wrote his Op Ed piece, a book about the Bay of Pigs appeared, written by Peter Wyden, formerly editor of *The Ladies' Home Journal*. In Wyden's book there are several quotes that he attributes to the "so-called Taylor Report" and with that

¹⁶ Bobby Kennedy later named a son Maxwell Taylor Kennedy.

¹⁷ Ordinarily, following a disaster such as the Bay of Pigs, there would have been an official inquiry with a full detailed report issued. The president, however, did not want a public inquiry, and he did not want a formal report. The Taylor Report was prepared by a committee that met secretly, calling itself "a paramilitary study group." About 10 years later, the author called Admiral Burke, whom he had worked with over the years, and asked him to lunch with a friend. During that luncheon, the author asked the admiral, whom he has always believed to have been the finest chief of naval operations the U.S. Navy ever had, about that report. He still denied there had ever been a report. He did not fib; he simply toyed with words. It was not technically a "report." It was a "letter to the president."

revelation the long-buried report became public.

Wyden mentions McGeorge Bundy and quotes liberally from the Taylor Report. This is undoubtedly why, in October 1979, Bundy finally made his long-overdue statement. He most assuredly had read the Wyden book¹⁸ and had heard people discussing the role he played in the strange Bay of Pigs drama.

Wyden had stated rather specifically about Bundy:

"Bissell's former student, Mac Bundy, agreed in 1977 that the air strength was not only too small; it was much too small, but he pointed out that the planners said nothing about it. . . . He felt that the cancelled strike was only a marginal adjustment. . . . Bundy blamed himself in one respect. 'I had a very wrong estimate of the consequences of failure, the mess.'"

Bissell, Bundy and Wyden were all referring to a few very specific lines from the Taylor Report that placed the blame for the defeat of the brigade on one telephone call. Keep in mind that Kennedy had approved the dawn air strike at 1:45 p.m., April 16, 1960:

"43. At about 9:30 p.m. on April 16, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President, telephoned General C.P. Cabell of CIA to inform him that the dawn air strikes the following morning should not be launched until they could be conducted from a strip within the beachhead."¹⁹

No wonder Bundy admitted he had "a very wrong estimate of the consequences." First of all, U-2 photos, taken late Saturday, April 15, showed the three T-33 jets parked wingtip to wingtip on a small airstrip near Santiago, Cuba. One eight-gun B-26 alone could have wiped them out on the ground. The CIA's operational commander at Puerto Cabezas was sending four B-26s to do the job that one could have done easily — provided the T-33s

were caught just before sunrise and on the ground. The brigade was scheduled to hit the beach at sunrise and that would have alerted Castro's air warning system and put the T-33s in the air. The Bundy directive to Cabell, as reported by Wyden, stating that no air strikes could be launched until after the brigade had secured the Giron airstrip, constituted a total misreading and a complete reversal of the approved tactical plan.

The dawn air strikes were essential to destroy the three T-33s on the ground — the only way the slower B-26s could destroy them. With them out of the way, Castro would have had no combat aircraft. The brigade would have been sub-

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ject to no air attacks, their supply ships would have been safe, and the "air cover" that some revisionists have talked about would have been totally unnecessary. This was the plan JFK had approved: Bundy misunderstood it . . . or did he?

There was one more thing to add about the McGeorge Bundy article, "The Brigade's My Fault." Bundy had no doubt seen the Wyden book. He realized then, after 18 years, that the "never written" Taylor "Letter to the President" had finally been released. He saw the undeniable evidence that it was he, Mac Bundy, who had cancelled the dawn air strike and had caused the failure of the brigade's gallant effort. There was nothing

he could do to alter those facts, except counterattack. He used a clever Freudian gambit. He let his mind think one thing and his fingers write another.

His Op Ed article says, "The Brigade's My Fault." Any alert reader seeing that title would immediately connect it with the Bay of Pigs brigade and its failure. But Bundy is clever. He instead wrote a rather nonsensical, slightly offbeat and quite disparaging article on the subject of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis. He didn't say one word about the Bay of Pigs.

He used the word, "brigade," but in a contrived context of the later event. It was clever, but it doesn't wash — especially not after the release of the Taylor Report, written right before the eyes of Robert F. Kennedy.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis of October 1962, the problem was with the Russian "technicians," i.e., rocket experts, and not with a brigade. The "brigade" was at the Bay of Pigs. Bundy furnishes two numbers, 22,000 and 2,600. Neither one is pertinent to anything, and neither represents a "brigade" of anything.

With Bundy's clever article in the *Times*, one is reminded of Richard Nixon's equally clever article in *The Reader's Digest*, "Cuba, Castro and John F. Kennedy," and then of Gerald Ford's gratuitous article in *Life* magazine, scooping the report of the Warren Commission with his "Piecing Together the Evidence."

Not one of these articles is completely true. They all have a special scenario to build, and all are revisionist. They are all written by men who have held high positions: two by ex-presidents and one by the man who was formerly the national security assistant to two presidents. They are, one way or the other, closely involved with that most important subject: the death of John F. Kennedy.

That will be the subject of a later article in this series. ▲

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Between 1955 and 1963, Colonel Prouty served as chief of special operations for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in a similar capacity with the Office of Special Operations in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and headed the Special Operations Office for the U.S. Air Force. All of these positions were charged with the military support of the clandestine operations of the CIA.

¹⁸ Wyden cites interviews with McGeorge Bundy as material for nearly every chapter in his book.

¹⁹ These are the exact words from paragraph 43 of the Taylor Report. Here is how Wyden distorts them to cover Bundy: "Cabell had every reason to be disturbed. He had just had a call from Mac Bundy. Bundy said no air strikes could be launched until after the brigade had secured the Giron airstrip, and strikes would ostensibly be launched from there. This was an order 'from the president.'" This is a most important bit of revisionism. The Taylor committee, with Bobby Kennedy as a member and one who closely read the report, says nothing about the president. Wyden and Bundy added that "order from the president," after the deaths of JFK and RFK, to cover Bundy's actions.