

Kennedys consumed by Castro, book says

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After the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, getting even with Cuban leader Fidel Castro became an obsession for President Kennedy and his brother Robert, according to a top CIA official of that era.

"The president and his brother were ready to avenge their personal embarrassment by overthrowing the enemy at any cost," wrote Richard M. Bissell, a former deputy CIA director who was a principal architect of the invasion.

Even though Robert Kennedy was attorney general at the time, his involvement in organizing and directing a guerrilla operation against Castro was so intense that he "might as well have been deputy director of plans for the operation," Mr. Bissell said.

The account appears in Mr. Bissell's posthumous memoirs, titled "Reflections of a Cold Warrior," published by Yale University Press, which made excerpts available on Wednesday, the 35th anniversary of the invasion.

The post-Bay of Pigs guerrilla operation, known as Operation Mongoose, sought to infiltrate Cuba with exiles to organize cells and initiate guerrilla activity.

It was almost a duplicate of the original CIA plan drawn up in 1960, which ultimately was scrapped in favor of an invasion plan.

Mr. Bissell said he recalled telephoning Robert Kennedy in Hyannisport, Mass., several times over Thanksgiving weekend in 1961 to reassure him that the CIA was doing everything possible to assist veteran guerrilla expert Edward Lansdale, who was in charge of the operation.

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Impatient with the progress, the Kennedys "wanted to get more saboteurs, more trained guerrillas who could be infiltrated sooner and, most important, results," Mr. Bissell wrote.

President Kennedy persisted, notwithstanding intelligence reports that Castro was getting strong despite American efforts to depose him, Mr. Bissell said. He added that President Kennedy's personal involvement debunks the notion of some that Operation Mongoose was carried out without authorization.

"All actions received his explicit authorization," Mr. Bissell wrote.

The anti-Castro fever of the Kennedys was matched, according to Mr. Bissell, by that of President Eisenhower during his final days in office.

Mr. Eisenhower was eager to take forceful action against Castro — and was prepared to do so even if it meant fabricating an excuse.

Meeting with Mr. Bissell and other CIA officers on Jan. 3, 1961, Mr. Eisenhower noted that "he was prepared to 'move against Castro' before Kennedy's inauguration if a 'really good excuse' was provided by Castro," Mr. Bissell wrote, quoting the president.

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