

■ The counterrevolution had not begun suddenly or dramatically. The future was foreshadowed in Castro's first year, 1959, after he entered Havana in triumph. The first signs occurred in October, 1959, when a secret meeting of the National Agrarian Reform Institute managers of Cuba was held in Havana. There, the suspicions of young Dr. Manuel Francisco Artime were confirmed. He heard Fidel outline a plan to communize Cuba within three years.

"I realized," Artime said, "that I was a democratic infiltrator in a communist government."

Artime took a leave of absence from his assignment position and went underground. By November he had laid the groundwork for the first anti-Castro action group originating from within Fidel's own ranks. When Castro's G-2 began searching for the leaders, Artime took asylum with the Jesuits in Havana.

On November 7 Artime's letter of resignation from the rebel army and agrarian institute ran on the front page of *Avance* in Havana. Addressed personally to Castro, the letter explained why Artime was resigning "my position in this

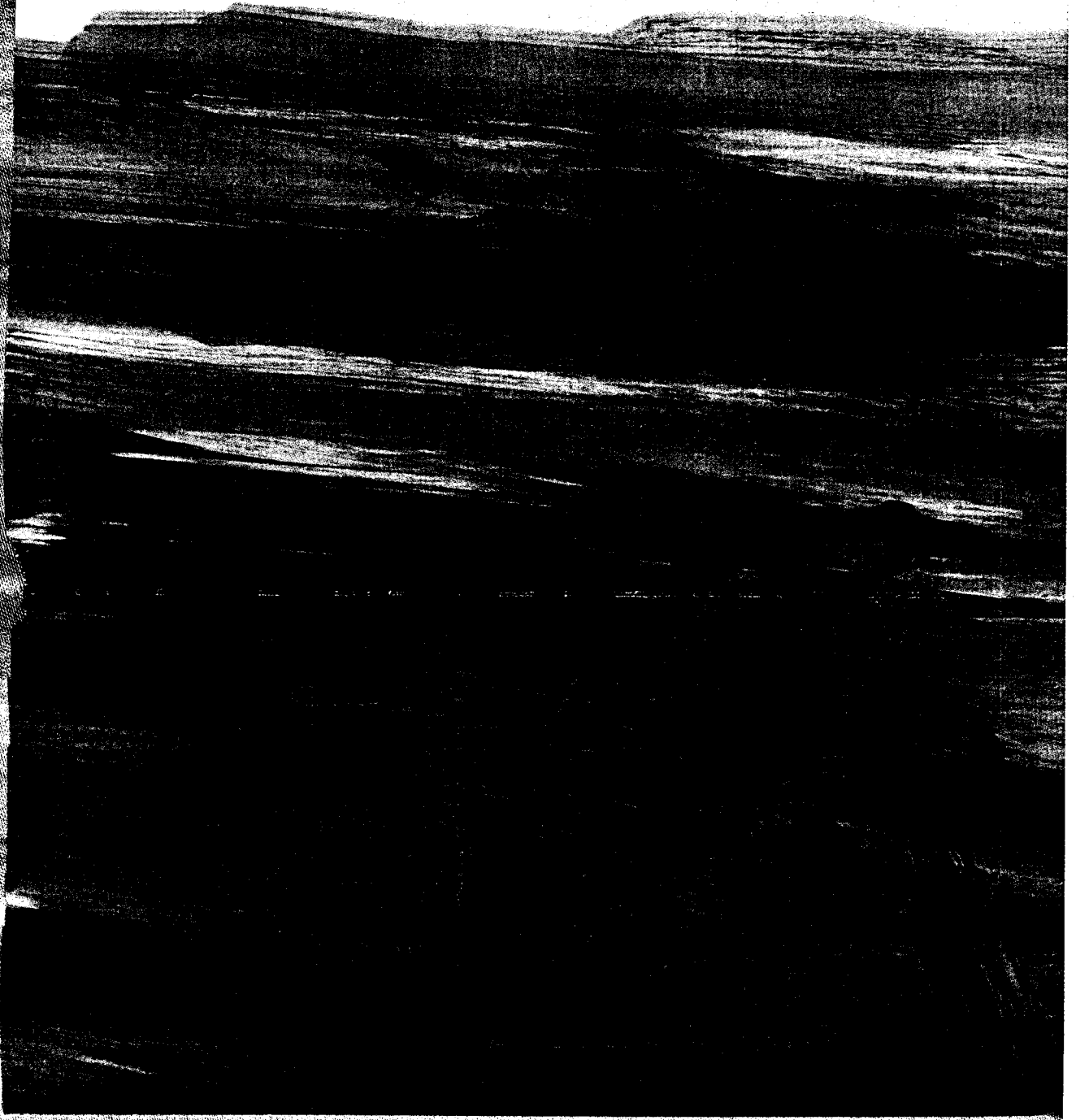


Red Army," referred to the "Red masquerade," and told Castro how he "had heard from your own lips the complete plans to communize Cuba." The letter was the sensation of the day. After it appeared a Jesuit priest said he would put Artime in touch with an American who could get him out of the country. At the American Embassy, Artime met a man who called himself "Williams." In December Williams put Artime aboard a Honduran freighter bound for Tampa.

As a man destined to play so important a role in the counterrevolution, Artime was in many respects an unlikely

candidate for history. He was then only 28 years old and he spoke no English. The son of a communist, he was a devout Catholic, a product of Jesuit schools. Though he had a degree as a medical doctor and was trained as a psychiatrist, he had been working with the peasants to improve agricultural production. He was short, stocky, black-haired, possessed a rasping voice and liked to write poetry.

When Artime's freighter docked in the bright morning sunshine at Tampa, he was met by "Mr. Burnett, a friend of Williams," who said he worked for a large group of



THE BAY OF PIGS



Ike created it; JFK launched it. Three days after invasion's failure they met at Camp David, Md., to display unity in an hour of national crisis.

Fidel Castro's militiamen (right) counterattack near Laguna del Tesoro. Contrary to CIA predictions, the militia was well-prepared and loyal to Castro.



Capt. Pedro Luis Rodriguez of Castro's forces denounces the 1,199 captured members of the 2506 brigade at mass trial in the basketball court of Principe Prison, Havana.

wealthy capitalists who were fighting communism.

From then on, Artime was in the hands of the CIA.

In Miami more "friends" interrogated him, said they would help him get weapons, and gave him a lie detector test. After the test was over, the Americans withdrew to another room. It was late at night when they returned. He remembers their words: "Okay, Artime, you are our friend, and we are going to be very close friends of yours."

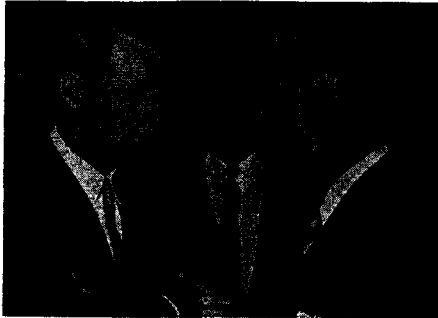
Artime was sent out of the country to tour Latin America and rally support for action against Castro. Then, on March 17, 1960, President Eisenhower authorized the CIA to organize, train and equip Cuban refugees as a guerrilla force to overthrow Castro. One of Artime's CIA contacts immediately had him fly to New York.

Here, in an expensive hotel, Artime met a Cuban friend accompanied by a tall, well-dressed American. The American introduced himself.

"It was the first time I heard his name," Artime said later. "I was going to hear that name until the Bay of Pigs. Frank Bender. The Great Frank Bender. 'All right, Manolo,' Bender said, 'we've got lots to talk about. I am the man in charge of the Cuban case.'"

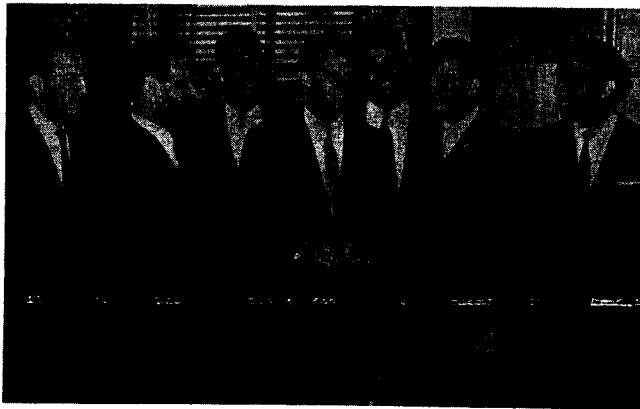
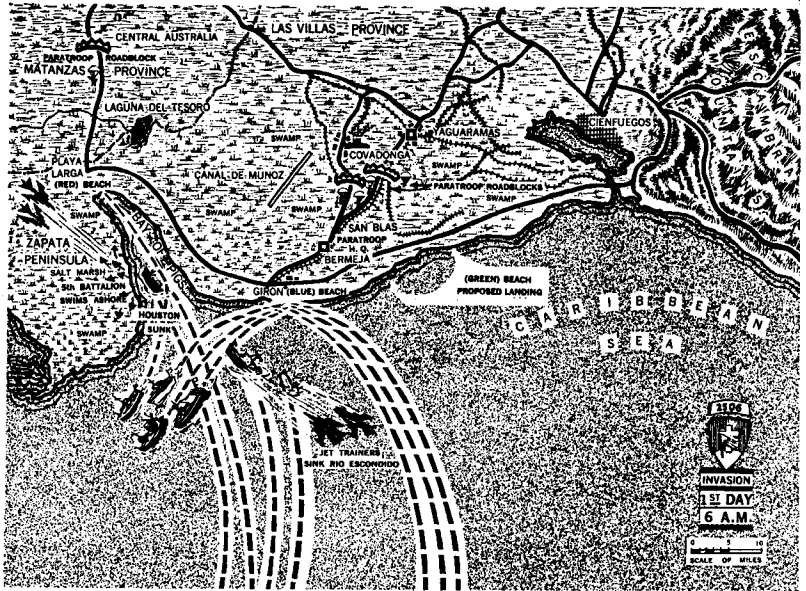
Bender asked for Artime's thoughts on the future of Cuba. He listened quietly as Artime discussed his ideas for a guerrilla uprising in Oriente Province, and then asked, "Why not an uprising all over the island?" Artime said he didn't have enough men or weapons for that.

"Well, Artime, what if I told you that we have men who will help you to prepare for guerrilla warfare and others who will prepare men to fight in a



Sparkplugs of effort to ransom captive invaders were (left to right) Atty. Gen. Robert F. Kennedy, Enrique Ruiz-Williams and James B. Donovan.

Map (right) shows landing points of anti-Castro forces at Playa Giron and Playa Larga. In the first day's fighting two ships were sunk by Castro planes which supposedly had been destroyed.



Brigade leaders, including four who helped write this book, present medal to Robert Kennedy for his role in liberating them. Left to right: Roberto San Roman, Manuel Artime, Ramon Ferrer, Kennedy, Enrique Ruiz-Williams, Pepe San Roman, Erneido Oliva.

conventional war with army training?"

"And you will give us the weapons?"

"All the weapons you need," Bender replied.

As he left the room, Bender shook hands and said, "Remember, Manolo, I am not a member of the United States government. I have nothing to do with the United States government. I am only working for a powerful company that wants to fight communism."

Jose Perez (Pepe) San Roman, 29, was a regular army officer who had served Cuba under a democratic regime, a dictatorship, and most recently and briefly under Fidel Castro. Tall, slender, dark-haired, quiet and reserved, he was among those freed from a Batista prison when Castro came down from the hills on New Year's Day, 1959. Before that year was out he had broken with Fidel, was again imprisoned, and finally succeeded in escaping to the United States. In Miami he was one of a group of 10 former officers planning a campaign against Fidel.

On June 2, 1960, San Roman and his fellow officers met Manuel Artime, who recruited them to go to a secret camp where men were being trained to liberate Cuba. On an island leased by Frank Bender off the west coast of Florida, Pepe and his friends joined a larger group of recruits who were being extensively tested by an American cadre. Each soldier received a serial designation starting from 2,500. That, the Americans said, would confuse the enemy; it would make Castro think there were many men instead of only a handful present. By next spring the serial numbers would be in the 4,000's.

On June 22 Pepe San [Continued on page 113]

THE BAY OF PIGS



[Continued from page 33]

Roman and 28 other Cubans were sent back to the mainland. There they were hustled into a C-54 transport plane whose windows were masked from the outside. Some six or seven hours later their plane landed in darkness, and they were herded into a waiting truck. After an hour-long trip, they emerged to find themselves in a camp deep in a tropical jungle.

An American of medium height and weight, with a scar on his face, who called himself "Peter," greeted them and introduced "John," "Dave," "Wally" and the rest of their first-name-only American instructors. All the Americans were in civilian clothing. The Cubans went to bed in nearby wooden barracks, tired and excited, hopeful and fearful. They did not know it, but they were in the U.S. army jungle warfare training camp area of Fort Gulick in the Canal Zone.

Next day, they began rugged training.

"We were taught how to fight as guerrillas," Pepe said. "At that point we believed that we were going to train a large number of Cubans for guerrilla war, that we were going to Cuba, and that we would always have what we had then—organization and control, good control. We never thought things were going to be handled the way they eventually were."

In August the Cubans completed their training and were given a farewell party with beer and a big cake. As they sang together, one of the Americans said, "Well, we'll meet in a free Cuba." Another American told Pepe they were going to a new base the next day, "where there were 5,000 men and everything was ready." The next evening, August 22, 1960, they again boarded a C-54 and flew off into the night.



Erneido Oliva had just celebrated his 28th birthday when he first heard of the invasion plan. Two Cuban underground workers contacted him in Havana in the summer of 1960. "They said there was going to be an invasion," Oliva recalls. "They were organizing troops in a camp in Latin America, with a recruiting office in the United States, and they wanted me to join."

Oliva, who already had decided to work against Castro, agreed to do anything he could. It had not been an easy decision, for Oliva was a loyal and dedicated officer, a graduate of the Cadet School, who at that time was serving the Castro government as a general inspector of agrarian reform throughout the island. And for Oliva, a Negro, to turn against the revolution was a contradiction of everything Fidel represented.

The question of race was important to Fidel; he capitalized on it and profited by it. As Oliva himself says, "When Fidel came in, it is true there were some districts in Cuba where the colored man was not permitted. I really believed at the beginning that Fidel was working for the real solution of the race problem—and not as a communist. As a colored man I was sympathetic.

"I discovered, however, that it was just another of Fidel's moves to divide and weaken. He was bringing division between the classes, races, and even between father and son—based on ideological differences—and in that division Fidel would find

his power. By the time the underground came to me, I believed that Fidel was using the colored people as a symbol to divide the country. By the end of 1959 a lot of colored people were against Fidel Castro—not all; the people of the streets were hearing and listening to the propaganda.

"Beyond all that, however, was the fact that as a lifelong Catholic I could not support communism."

In August, 1960, Oliva escaped from Cuba. In the United States he was recruited by the organization Artime had set up, and after the usual mysterious journey by truck and plane found himself at a large coffee plantation in a country he identified, from a chance meeting with a Guatemalan acquaintance, as Guatemala.

Oliva met a group of his countrymen quartered in a wooden warehouse and questioned them eagerly. Where was the liberation army, which he had been told numbered 5,000 men? Where were the weapons and artillery? Where was the training camp?

"They told me that higher in the mountains there was another group of men, but that there were only about a hundred men in all," Oliva says. "They didn't have weapons, they didn't have uniforms, they didn't have good food, they didn't have water, and there were no barracks to live in. We felt very sad."

Within four days the new soldiers began the dangerous trip to the camp 2,000 feet above—a climb which took one and a half hours. Base Trax, as the camp was called, was on volcanic soil that became quite spongy and swampy when it rained. By day the men built barracks and drainage fields, and attempted to pour cement foundations in the rain. At night they began receiving military instruction from a Cuban cadre, of which Pepe San Roman and his younger brother, Roberto, were members.

At midday of September 7, Roberto San Roman and Alejandro del Valle came back from a patrol training mission with shattering news. Roberto, Del Valle, a man named Rafo, and Carlos (Carlyle) Rafael Santana, an idealistic young student, who was probably the most popular man in the camp, had been searching for a trail when disaster struck.

"We went into a very thick woods and started cutting our way with the machete, going down and down for about an hour and a half," Roberto said. "Then the slope became so nearly vertical that we had to hold on to roots to keep our footing. And then we got to a place where we couldn't see more than a few feet ahead through the vegetation. We had to jump to a ledge anyway because a waterfall was in our path. When we jumped, Carlyle hurt his left knee. We decided to climb to the other side.

"In half an hour I think we climbed no more than 50 meters. It was all rocks and wet and the man ahead had to pass the word back, 'Put your hand here. Do exactly as I do.' I was leading and everybody had to follow, and after 25 minutes I grabbed the first tree, the first good solid tree, and in that moment I think Carlyle fainted or grabbed something loose. Anyway, he started going down, falling down, trying to grab hold of something, but he couldn't, and then he hit a little ledge. He was falling so fast that his body jumped about 200

eters. We started calling out very loud to him, but nothing happened."

The Cubans immediately formed groups to search for Carlyle. It began raining—one of the hardest rains since their arrival. Until 1 o'clock in the morning they clambered up and down the mountains, in groups of five, tied together at the waist by ropes, searching and calling in the faint hope Carlyle might still be alive. Finally they had to stop. Early the next morning some Indians spotted the body. They started working at 7 that morning to lift it with ropes, and by evening it was brought back to camp.

"That day we did not work," Oliva said. "Everybody was very sad. He was the first man to die. It was the day of *La Caridad del Cobre*, the patron saint of Cuba."

The food was bad, the rain was incessant, the living conditions were crowded, tempers were short and morale was low—still, in the months that followed the camp took form.

In November, 1960, after a campaign in which Cuba had been the dominant international issue, 69 million Americans voted for a new President. When the ballots were counted, John F. Kennedy was elected by slightly more than 100,000 votes. Flushed from his victory, confident about the future, the President-elect went to Palm Beach, Florida, to rest after the campaign. There, on November 18, Allen Dulles, the director of the CIA, and Richard Bissell, the chief CIA architect of the Cuban training plans, told Kennedy of the existence of the camp in Guatemala.

Immediately, he was faced with making the first of many decisions about Cuba that would mark his administration.



In November, 1960, the "special group"—a group of top officials of the State Department, Pentagon, CIA and White House directing the overall planning of the Cuban counterrevolution—decided to discard their original idea of a guerrilla operation and put in its place a plan to overthrow Castro by invasion and direct action. The idea that the few hundred men then recruited could overthrow Castro in a frontal assault is all the more astonishing in view of the known facts of Castro's forces then. On November 18, for example, the State Department made public details of military aid to Cuba from the Soviet bloc. At that time, the department said, Castro's army was judged to be 10 times the size Batista's had been.

The effects of the change from guerrilla operation to assault landing were felt immediately in Guatemala. Early in November an American known as "Frank" took charge of Base Trax. Frank (an Army colonel, not to be confused with Frank Bender), a florid, sandy-haired, aggressive and commanding figure, went to work energetically. He had brought with him plans for creating an assault brigade.

Pepe San Roman was appointed brigade commander and four battalions were formed. Pepe named Alejandro del Valle to command the First Battalion of paratroopers, while Hugo Sueiro headed the Second Battalion of Infantry, Oliva led the "bomblene" or Armored Battalion, and Roberto San Roman, Pepe's brother, was in charge of the Heavy Gun Battalion.

In order to create *esprit de corps*, Frank suggested that the men choose a name for their brigade. Pepe San Roman and his officers at first wanted to call themselves Carlyle Brigade in honor of Carlos Santana, the first of their men to die; then Pepe decided to use Carlyle's serial number, 2506. The men liked the name and Brigade 2506 was formed.

Slowly, in groups of 40 or 50, recruits were transported from Miami to Guatemala. In January, 1961, the Americans appointed Oliva second in command to Pepe. Meanwhile factional quarrels among exile leaders in Miami were causing dissension within the Brigade and creating problems for the American planners. In February, Artime and Frank Bender conferred in Washington and formed a new Cuban "government in exile," the Cuban Revolutionary Council, which included such men as Manuel Ray, Castro's former Minister of Public Works, and Miro Cardona, Castro's first Premier.

By the end of February a great rush had begun to join *La Brigada*, as the Cubans called it, before the ships sailed.

Soon after his inauguration, John F. Kennedy began meeting with his advisers on the problem of Cuba. He found that the invasion plan as then worked out was endorsed by Allen Dulles, head of the CIA, Gen. Lyman Lemnitzer, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Adm. Arleigh Burke, Chief of

Naval Operations. More than a dozen meetings, conferences and briefings on the Cuban invasion were held in Washington between November, 1960 and April, 1961. By March the invasion site was selected: the *Bahia de Cochinos*, the Bay of Pigs.

Perhaps the most important meeting took place on April 4 with President Kennedy presiding. Seated around the long table were Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of the Treasury Douglas Dillon, Assistant Secretary of State for Latin American Affairs Thomas Mann, Assistant Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze, Senator William J. Fulbright of Arkansas, and three presidential advisors and specialists on Latin America: Adolph A. Berle, Jr., Richard Goodwin and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell of the CIA were also there, as was General Lemnitzer.

Richard Bissell, the man who had masterminded the U-2 flights over Russia, was the first to speak. It was his final review of the Cuban operation. The Brigade would land and hold its territory until the Cuban Revolutionary Council declared itself a "government in arms" and rallied internal support to itself. The situation inside Cuba was ripe for rebellion. The Brigade air force would control the skies and operate from a captured field near the Bay of Pigs. Castro's planes would be wiped out by a Brigade air attack before the invasion.

An alternative plan had been prepared for use in the event of a total disaster. The Cubans would be told that if, somehow, the invasion foundered they would move inland to the Escambray Mountains as a guerrilla force. (Pepe San Roman says, "We were never told about this. What we were told was, 'If you fail we will go in.'")

From the beginning, the alternative plan had been a major element in the planning process. The President and other important officials were repeatedly assured that the Brigade had been trained as guerrillas when, in fact, there is no evidence that the Brigade received any guerrilla training after November, 1960, the date of the change in concept from guerrilla to invasion. Until November, 1960, the Cuban force consisted of only 300 men.

One who was there says Bissell gave the plan his unqualified support. Dulles spoke briefly and also backed the plan. The President pointed around the table, man by man, asking for approval or disapproval. No one opposed the invasion.

"Let 'er rip," one man said.

On one point President Kennedy was clear: *under no conditions were American forces to be committed to the invasion.* It was a firm decision, one which was impressed on everyone, whether civilian, military, CIA or Cuban politician.

On Thursday, April 13, a cable was sent to a special emissary of the President in Guatemala, a personable, professional military man then working with the CIA, asking him to reply by "emergency precedence" if in any way he had changed his evaluation of the Brigade. He immediately replied:

"My observations have increased my confidence in the ability of this force to accomplish not only initial combat missions, but also the ultimate objective, the overthrow of Castro. The Brigade and battalion commanders now know all details of the plan and are enthusiastic. They say they know their own people and believe that after they have inflicted one serious defeat upon the opposition forces, the latter will melt away from Castro, whom they had no wish to support. They say it is a Cuban tradition to join a winner and they have supreme confidence they will win against whatever Castro has to offer. I share their confidence."

When the author showed Pepe San Roman this passage, San Roman commented: "This conversation never took place with me or any of my commanders. He says that we knew all the details of the plan. Actually, we knew nothing."

A person who is able to speak with unquestioned authority said this glowing report overcame the last of the President's doubts.

At Base Trax at the end of March, Frank called Pepe San Roman and Oliva to his headquarters. He told them the invasion was imminent, there would be two beachheads, and, as he had told them earlier, the Brigade would not be the only unit involved. The entire invasion force would assemble at a base he called Trampoline—the springboard—which would have to remain unidentified until they reached it.

"Frank told Pepe and me," Oliva said, "that the Marines were not going with us to invade Cuba, but they would be close to us when we needed them."

Early in April Artime was in the camp as the civilian representative of the Revolutionary Council. Frank called Pepe and Oliva again. This time he had startling information. There were forces in the administration trying to block the invasion, and Frank might be ordered to stop it. If he received such an order, he said he would secretly inform Pepe and Oliva. Pepe remembers Frank's next words this way:

"If this happens you come here and make some kind of show, as if you were putting us, the advisors, in prison, and you go ahead with the program as we have talked about it, and we will give you the whole plan, even if we are your prisoners."

Pepe and Oliva were disturbed by this plan, but they had such faith in the Americans that they agreed to follow it if necessary.

Frank then called in Artime and privately told him the same thing. Artime was as stunned as the others. Frank never said who opposed the invasion—it was just "forces in the administration," or "politicians," or "chiefs above." He did say that if he received the order to stop the invasion, "I have also orders from my bosses, my commanders, to continue anyway." It cannot be determined what bosses, if any, gave Frank such instructions.

Out of more than 10 secret meetings with Frank at Base Trax came several dominant impressions. Oliva summed them up: 1) the forces that would land in Cuba were much larger than the Brigade's 1,500 men; 2) the Cubans would have the complete support of the United States government, including United States military—and air—support; 3) the invasion was going to take place even if Washington tried to stop it; 4) most important to the Cubans, the invasion was going to succeed and they would liberate their country.

On April 9, 10 and 11 the Brigade and its equipment were moved by transport plane to Trampoline, which many of the men were able to recognize at once as the Atlantic coastal city of Puerto Cabezas in Nicaragua. There they saw the ships that would take them to Cuba—old cargo vessels, unpainted and in bad condition. The sight of them gave Enrique Ruiz-Williams, second-in-command of the Heavy Gun Battalion, "a cold feeling." The landing craft were 14-foot open boats powered by outboard motors and unarmed. The cargo ships were armed with .50 caliber machine guns which seemed poorly placed to the Cubans, but they were assured that there would be plenty of additional air and sea support at all times.

Frank gave Artime and the Brigade officers their final briefing on April 14 at Trampoline base. They were shown a map and given copies of "Operation Pluto," as the invasion plan was called officially, at 9 a.m. The Cubans read:

"Commencing at H-Hour of D-Day, the Brigade is to engage in amphibious and parachute landings, take, occupy and defend beachheads in the area of Cochinos Bay and Playa Giron of the Zapata Swamps in order to establish a base from which ground and air operations against the Castro government of Cuba may be carried out."

The Bay of Pigs has a width of 10 to 12 miles at its mouth and tapers gradually inland for 18 miles from the Caribbean. At its northernmost point, not far from a lake called "El Tesoro" (Treasure Lake) is Playa Larga, or Long Beach. To the west is the Zapata Peninsula. To the southeast the coastline runs smoothly for 20 miles until it reaches the town of Playa Giron. Along the shore there is hard, rocky soil, and then for about three miles inland the land is smooth and firm. Immediately after that begins the Cienaga de Zapata, sometimes called the "Great Swamp of the Caribbean," extending 65 miles from east to west and 20 miles from north to south. The Zapata Swamps are covered with hardwood timber growing in a vast expanse of marshy terrain.

Operation Pluto called for landings at three points—Playa Larga, called "Red Beach"; Giron, "Blue Beach"; and "Green Beach" a point 20 miles to the east of Giron cutting the road to Cienfuegos, a city farther to the east. Giron was the center of the invasion. There, at Blue Beach, San Roman would land and establish his command post. From Red Beach to Green Beach, the Brigade would control 40 miles of Cuban coast line.

An intelligence expert called Bill told them that Castro would have few tanks and no air force. And he said there were more than 500 guerrillas nearby waiting to help the Brigade.

Then Frank said they were to hold the beach for 72 hours. And what were they supposed to do after that? "We will be there with you for the next step," Frank said. "But you will be so strong, you will be getting so many people to your side,

that you won't want to wait for us. You will go straight ahead. You will put your hands out, turn left, and go straight into Havana."

Frank made a sweeping gesture with his arm that no man present that day will ever forget. There was a great shout from the Cubans. Some had tears in their eyes.

When it came to support, Frank was equally emphatic: there was no question they would have air superiority. Nothing was said about United States air support, or about jets. It was said that the enemy would not be able to get to the Brigade; that it would be destroyed from the air; that no trucks or troops would be able to get through the roads because all the roads would be bombed; that "every five minutes there will be a plane over all the major roads of Cuba."

Frank said in response to a question that if anything went wrong the Cubans should communicate with the rear base and he would give them instructions. *Nothing* was said about an alternative plan, and as this is written only one of the four leading Cubans knows that such a plan existed; he learned of it two years after the invasion. Later, in a secret top-level administration investigation that followed in the wake of the invasion, it was learned that the CIA decided, on its own, not to give the Brigade the alternative plan. The explanation was given that it might weaken the Brigade's resolve to keep fighting, that they might choose the alternative plan when the going became rough, even though the invasion still had a chance of success. The most charitable explanation that can be placed on this reckless action is that the CIA assumed such terrible responsibility with the best of intentions: it was convinced the Cubans would win and therefore in the classic sense the end would justify the means.

It was 5 o'clock in the afternoon on Friday, April 14, when the officers left the briefing area for the pier. At the last moment Frank took Pepe aside. He told him that if he were ordered to halt the invasion while the ships were at sea he would send Pepe a radio message saying, "Come back, don't go ahead."

That meant the opposite: it was really clear; they were to go ahead.

"But if I send you a message in code that says the bird—the Guatemalan bird, the quetzal—'The quetzal is on the branches of the tree'—that means Fidel is waiting for you, so you will have to come back."

As they neared the cargo vessels in the small outboard motor launches, the officers saw the men of the Brigade lining the railings, singing and cheering. Each battalion had been issued a different-colored scarf. Now they were waving them—blue, yellow, white, black, red—from each ship. The officers boarded, and the convoy of five transports and two escort vessels steamed slowly out to sea as the day ended.



On the morning of Saturday, April 15, 1961, eight B-26 bombers manned by Brigade members struck Cuba, bombing San Antonio de los Banos, Santiago de Cuba and Ciudad Libertad adjoining Camp Columbia, the main base for Castro's air force. Later that day, in the United Nations, Dr. Raul Roa, Cuba's Foreign Minister, accused the United States government directly of aggression. Adlai E. Stevenson, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, had been assured by the State Department that the planes that bombed Cuba were Castro's planes piloted by defectors from Castro's air force, and he repeated this story in his reply to Roa, along with a declaration that there would be no United States intervention in Cuban affairs under any conditions.

Aboard the Brigade convoy San Roman received a message from Frank. It said the bombing mission had been accomplished successfully and nearly all the enemy aircraft had been destroyed. That message resulted in one of the great miscalculations of the invasion. The Brigade air force report stated that eight to 10 planes had been put out of service at San Antonio; six to eight at Ciudad Libertad; and 12 planes at Santiago de Cuba—all of which would have left Castro with almost no air power. While the attack *did* inflict considerable damage, Castro actually still had four fighters, two Sea Furies and two jet T-33's, as well as two B-26 bombers.

By noon Sunday the Brigade forces were committed; it was then too late to stop the invasion. Some time after this hour had passed, President Kennedy made one of the most difficult decisions of his administration.

Russia and China were threatening action—if not in Cuba,

then perhaps in Berlin, or Laos or Vietnam. The realities of the Cold War, the life-and-death stakes involved, the gamble Cuba represented, the apparent success of the Brigade air attack on Saturday, the President's pledge, publicly given at a press conference the previous week, against direct American intervention in Cuba, and the assurance of his advisors that the invasion had a chance of success without such American support, led him eventually to a decision: the second air strike, scheduled for dawn Monday to coincide with the invasion, was canceled. Retrospect or hindsight does not alter the central fact about that decision: it was consistent with the President's policy, stated unequivocally both publicly and privately, that the Cuban affair must not be allowed to jeopardize larger United States interests.

The order went out to the Brigade air force at Puerto Cabezas to cancel the second attack.



By 7:45 p.m. on Sunday, April 16, the five principal ships and their two escort vessels had reached the rendezvous point 30 miles south of Cienfuegos where they were joined by landing craft carrying tanks, heavy equipment and Cuban crews. Aboard Oliva's ship, the *Houston*, the men spontaneously began singing the Cuban national hymn. Then the convoy began moving up the coast toward the Bay of Pigs.

At 11 p.m. five Cuban frogmen prepared to leave the *Blagar* in two rubber rafts to place white and red lights on the beach to mark the landing zone at Giron. The frogmen entered their inflated rafts and silently moved toward shore. Gray, an American who had trained them, was with them and Gray, the American, was the first to land in the invasion—despite the insistence of President Kennedy that no Americans participate in the action.

By the time they had succeeded in placing the first landing light, it was 15 minutes before midnight. The light flashed on the beach, from beside a concrete pier, and as it did the men aboard the *Blagar* saw other lights: a small vehicle was moving rapidly toward the beach from Giron, a half mile to the east. It was a jeep. It stopped, backed up and turned its lights toward the sea. The frogmen, led by Gray, opened fire with their automatic rifles; but the alarm had been sounded and now a truck carrying Castro militiamen was heading toward them.

As the firing began, the lights of Giron went off. By radio the frogmen called for support from the *Blagar* and soon the shooting was intense. Farther out to sea the Third, Fourth, Sixth and Heavy Gun Battalions lined the rails of the troopships, straining to see through the darkness, tensely wondering if their men or Castro's were winning.

While the shooting continued, the first landing craft edged toward the coast line carrying men of the Fourth Battalion from the *Caribe*. Because of the unexpected opposition, San Roman decided to go ashore in that boat to direct the fighting.

Now the trouble began. It stemmed from an almost incredible miscalculation by Americans who, by record, reputation and experience were the unsurpassed experts at amphibious operations. During World War II, not one assault landing had been attempted at night. Yet, in the first such landing planned by Americans, the coral reefs inexplicably had been ignored or forgotten. Certainly the reefs were unknown to the invasion troops and their boats struck. Some were sunk, some merely delayed. The invasion schedule was set back and surprise, the only advantage of attempting a risky landing at night, was lost.

From their small fiber-glass boat approaching Playa Larga the second team of Cuban frogmen could see, far away, flames in the sky over Giron. They moved toward the shore until they could distinguish shacks along the waterfront. Fifteen yards from the beach their boat struck coral; they jumped out and raced toward a grove of trees. Leading them ashore was "Rip," an American who had joined them in Nicaragua. Thus, at the second beachhead of the Bay of Pigs, an American was also the first to land.

Once ashore, the frogmen began placing the markers they had made on their voyage from Nicaragua. They were finishing the job when they were suddenly attacked by Castro militia from one of the nearby shacks.

"We opened up almost automatically with our BAR's and we really gave them hell," said Andy Pruna. "We knocked out perhaps as many as 20 in a few minutes and the rest ran away and left their weapons."

Aboard the *Houston*, the first of eight fiber-glass boats swung

over the side and down to the sea. On the deck all other sounds were lost in the screeching of the ancient winches. It was obvious to Oliva that they could be heard for miles.

Oliva told Hugo Sueiro, the Second Battalion commander, to hurry. The plan called for the men to board boats at three stations, ranging aft from the bow. Problems developed immediately. The motors on the boats sputtered and choked out in the sea. By 1:10 a.m., as Sueiro was approaching the beach in the first boat, machine guns began firing from the coast toward the *Houston*. The *Houston's* guns answered, and the frogmen were caught in the crossfire. The Castro machine guns were knocked out, but when the firing ceased one of the invaders was dead—the first to die at the Bay of Pigs.

At 2:30 a.m. Oliva reached the shore. By then only sporadic firing was heard. Oliva headed toward the front where Sueiro reported they had destroyed a truck of militia and had taken prisoners. As he walked toward a shack not far from the beach, Oliva made an alarming discovery: "I saw the antenna of a micro-wave station and we captured it at once. You could see that they had transmitted from there recently."

Oliva instantly recognized the seriousness of the situation; but of more immediate concern was the landing itself. The outboard motors on the eight fiber-glass landing boats were not working. Two of them went out of service immediately (on one the propeller fell off and into the sea as soon as the boat was launched). One after the other the other six failed in the middle of the Bay. Although there were only 185 men in the Second Battalion, by 5:30 in the morning the last of the men still had not come ashore. Also left to be unloaded were the entire Fifth Battalion and all of the supplies, including ammunition, for the area. Oliva is convinced that had they had only three LCU's, both battalions and the supplies would have reached the beach by 3 o'clock.

At 6 a.m. Juan Luis Cosculluela, a young Cuban navy captain, called the *Blagar* to report the completion of a mission. He and the frogmen had charted a path through the coral reef. At 6:25 landing craft carrying tanks and the men of the Heavy Gun Battalion began arriving at the beaches. Cosculluela, after supervising the landing, was returning to the *Blagar* in a launch when a B-26, painted blue with a Cuban flag on its wings, flew over and dipped its wings in salute. Certain that it was one of theirs, Cosculluela and others waved back. Then the plane opened fire. Following it was another—and then another. Soon they were joined by Sea Fury fighters and T-33 jets. The remainder of the Heavy Gun Battalion and all of the Sixth and Third Battalions had to land under fire.

Rip and the frogmen had gone to the *Houston* in a launch to assist in the landing. By then only a few men of the Second Battalion were left aboard; but all the Fifth—the greenest in the Brigade, with only a few days of training—was still aboard. Rip began yelling for the men to get off but they were reluctant. In anger he shouted: "It's your war, you bastards. Get off!" Ten men got off and headed for the beach. From behind them they heard the motors of an airplane. It was a B-26 and they, too, thought it was one of theirs. The plane attacked them. As it turned toward the horizon and came back, Rip stood up and shouted: "Everybody fire at the goddam thing!" This time they hit it, and when it made a third pass it went down in flames.

More aircraft were on the way—first a Brigade B-26 to provide cover for the invaders and then three of Castro's planes, two T-33 jets and a Sea Fury. The slower Brigade plane didn't have a chance. (The Brigade B-26's flew without tail guns to permit them to carry more fuel for the 14-hour round trip flight from Nicaragua.)

With the *Barbara J* under attack, and unable to give support, the *Houston* was defenseless. Two planes came low over the mangroves and one made a direct rocket hit. There was a hollow clang and the ship started taking in water. Miraculously, the rocket had passed through the deck and on through the bottom of the ship without exploding. Laden as it was with ammunition and gasoline, the *Houston* would almost certainly have blown to bits had the rocket detonated. And over half her troops were still on board! A small fire broke out below decks, but as Alberto Pico said, "God was with us." The water coming through the hole that the rocket had made extinguished the fire. Luis Morse, the captain, headed the stricken ship toward the coast and succeeded in grounding it 300 yards from shore. There it stayed—a broken vessel, oil oozing from its holes, a sitting target for the planes. Without weapons, some stripped to their underwear, the men jumped into the oily water and

were strafed by Castro's planes. Some drowned, some were attacked by sharks. At least 28 men died in the sea. Those who got ashore were dispirited and defeated. They huddled under the trees and awaited orders from the commanders.

Minutes after the loss of the *Houston* a second, even greater, disaster overtook the Brigade. It was shortly after 7 o'clock when Oliva, at Playa Larga, heard a tremendous explosion from the vicinity of Giron; even from that distance black smoke could be seen mushrooming into the sky. It looked as if an atomic bomb had been dropped over Giron. A Sea Fury, diving out of the sun, had made a direct rocket hit on the *Rio Escondido*. Those who survived the enormous blast jumped into the sea where they, too, were strafed by the planes. It was an irreparable loss, for the *Rio Escondido* carried the supplies for the first ten days of fighting—ammunition, food, hospital equipment and gasoline. Also lost was the Brigade's communications trailer—the primary method of communications with the battalions in the combat zones, as well as with the flagship and the rear base in Nicaragua. Why such a vast majority of all the supplies needed for any success whatsoever was committed to one ship is a question still unanswered by the CIA.

By radio, the task force commander told Pepe he had been ordered to withdraw his ship, because he was unable to hold his position. The air attacks already had brought another change in the invasion plan: instead of landing at Green Beach, 30 kilometers to the east toward Cienfuegos, the Third Battalion was forced to come in at Giron, where Pepe immediately sent them on foot two miles to the east to protect his right flank. The departure of the ships was an even more critical change in plans, for the Brigade had unloaded less than 10 percent of its ammunition, and the *Blagar* and *Barbara J* were supposed to patrol the coast from Playa Larga to Giron, supporting the Brigade with its guns.

Over the western (Playa Larga) front at the drop zone on the road to Central Australia, Del Valle's heavy equipment was dropped first; his paratroopers followed. They never saw their equipment again—it was lost in the swamps. In addition, an advance group was lost in the swamps, another badly missed its drop zone, with some landing behind the enemy lines. They landed under heavy fire. When they reached the ground they found one of their men dead, dangling from a tree by his parachute. Another had been killed before he hit the ground.

On the eastern front the paratroopers fared better. The various units landed successfully, without strong opposition, and moved to assigned forward positions designed to block the roads.

Del Valle dispatched men along the two roads to select a place for the 4.2 mortars. They walked forward until they lost radio contact and by that time, in midmorning, the mortars were arriving by truck. Roberto San Roman and his reinforcements had made the link-up from Giron. As they were placing the mortars on the road to Yaguaramas, word came that a battalion of Castro soldiers was attacking the advance post.

At Brigade headquarters, when Pepe San Roman made the first faint contact with Oliva at Playa Larga, the report was equally discouraging. It was 10 o'clock in the morning. Oliva said his situation was difficult and that his men had been in continuous combat since landing. He had lost contact with the Fifth Battalion and had been unable to reach the paratroopers forward of his position.

Even with their supply lines cut, their backs to the sea and no communications, San Roman and his commanders were not in despair. It was not false heroism, or naiveté, but an unshakable conviction that they would not be let down; that victory therefore was inevitable. It was inconceivable that they would be stranded.

Once established in his headquarters, Pepe had inspected his positions and dispatched messengers to the various battalion commanders for firsthand reports from the front. From the beginning he had expected the main enemy attack to come through San Blas toward Giron. He knew that the body of Castro's army was stationed in Las Villas. But instead it was headed toward Playa Larga. Another concern was his right flank and the road to Cienfuegos. The Third Battalion, supported by a tank and 4.2 mortars from the Heavy Gun Battalion, was up the road but far from where it was supposed to be.

With the *Houston* grounded and the Fifth Battalion out of action, Oliva deployed his men as best he could. To the front, as the vanguard of the battalion, he sent a company commanded by Maximo Leonardo Cruz. To the northwest, to take

the entrance of the road to Buenaventura, went a company led by Oscar Luis Acevedo. The third and remaining company of the battalion, headed by Pedro Avila, was kept in reserve at Playa Larga.



Cruz' first major encounter with the enemy was decisive for hours. It began when a number of militia appeared coming toward them out of the brush. "I let them take a certain time to get together and I took advantage of the *agrupación* (massing). They were very close and when they were together I fired at them with the 75mm., with the .50-caliber machine gun, and with the 57mm. cannon. I destroyed them completely. The 57 made a direct hit on their truck with a grenade of *fósforo vivo* (white phosphorus). I was looking when the grenade hit the truck and the whole truck blew up and I saw the men jumping, dying and being burned by the *fósforo vivo*. The rest ran away and did not come back until 2 p.m."

At Playa Larga, the lull in the fighting gave Oliva a chance to assess the situation. Some wounded and dead, including women—all Castro's militia—had been brought back from the front and more than 40 prisoners had been taken.

About that time Oliva made contact with Luis Morse aboard the *Houston*. He ordered the Fifth Battalion commander to reorganize his men and within an hour Montero Duque, the commander, reported by radio that he had organized the landing of the remainder of his personnel in rubber boats and that a great number were together on the shore, about 10 miles from Playa Larga. At 20 minutes to 3, Oliva ordered an assistant to take two trucks and an infantry squad from Avila's company to pick up men of the Fifth and bring them to the front. Minutes later he canceled the truck mission after receiving a fateful message from Cruz at the front. That message signaled the beginning of what came to be known in Cuba as the "Battle of the Lost Battalion"—the 839th Battalion of Castro militia leaders from Matanzas. The encounter began with a report by two of Cruz' scouts.

"I had two men about 600 yards ahead to the front," Cruz said, "so they could observe the enemy. They came back about 2:30 p.m. and they told me that the enemy was advancing in a column. They were coming through the center of the highway, straight on it, in a close formation. These people were crazy coming that way down the hill in the middle of the road. We were in a very good position at both sides of the road, camouflaged. Between the enemy and me there was a swamp and trees on both sides of the road. We were able to shoot well from this position."

Cruz told Oliva what he could see through his binoculars. Instantly Oliva called Sueiro, the battalion commander, and prepared to leave for the front. Fortuitously, the tank from Giron, driven by Fernandez Torres Mena, arrived at that moment with the squad from the Fourth Battalion.

"When the enemy was about 500 yards from us they stopped," Cruz said, "and started putting up their mortars and getting their weapons prepared. They didn't send any forward observers to see where we were and they didn't know our positions. When I saw that they had all their weapons ready, I gave the order to open fire. I had to do it because they were getting organized there. When I gave the order to fire, you could see them flying up in the air. I threw everything at them with the three shells of the 75 I had left, with the 57, with the machine guns and all the weapons we had there. In 10 or 15 minutes there was a big mound of dead men all over the road."

Then at exactly 3:05 p.m., as Oliva said, "They were so unlucky that in our area appeared two B-26's." It was the first time that the Brigade had made contact with its air support that day. The first pilot radioed for instructions, and Oliva told him to make a pass and observe what was coming. When he reported back, he said there were approximately 700 men in 60 or 70 vehicles—jeeps, buses, trucks—heading straight toward them. "He asked me what he should do and I said, 'Give it to them,'" Oliva said.

The planes made two or three passes, dropping rockets and bombs.

"How beautiful it was from the ground!" a soldier murmured. "How beautiful from the ground and our airplanes in the air!"

But the carnage was horrible. The road was a solid wall of flames.

"No quedó ni el gato (Not even the cat was alive)," Cruz said.

Out of nearly 900 men in that Castro battalion only a handful survived. This, indeed, was air support.

The planes had been supporting the Brigade for 25 minutes, and no Castro fighters had appeared. On the ground Oliva heard, by radio, one of the pilots say to the other: "Let's go because I've finished my ammunition and don't have much gasoline."

"No," the reply came back, "there's a sonofabitch in there that shot at me and I'm going to get him."

The men watched as one plane circled over Playa Larga and the other headed toward Central Australia.

"I hit him, I hit him," came the cry of the pilot

At that moment a T-33 jet and a Sea Fury appeared.

"I've got a T-33 on my tail. Shoot at him! Shoot at him!"

The second Brigade pilot answered: "I don't have any ammunition."

"They hit me. They hit me," were the last words. Both Brigade planes were shot down.

As the sound of the battle ceased, a soldier at Playa Larga squinted into the sun toward the front. "There were crowds of vultures flying to the battlefield and it made me think how quickly the human body can corrupt itself."

Oliva returned to his headquarters and personally questioned prisoners. He learned that a great concentration was being formed at Central Australia and that he could expect a major assault that night. He dispatched a messenger to Giron, requesting reinforcements, tanks and ammunition. As he was interrogating the prisoners, Cruz again called from the front. Two ambulances were coming down the road.

"If they come to pick up their wounded, let them do it," Oliva said.

The ambulances came closer. Behind them was a white truck painted with a Red Cross emblem, and behind that Cruz saw other trucks with troops. Again he called Oliva.

"I told him to start shooting," Oliva said. Cruz did. The enemy was routed. It was the last combat of the afternoon at Playa Larga. But out of it Castro eventually reaped a propaganda advantage: when the fighting was over, he displayed pictures of the Red Cross vehicle riddled with bullets to show the barbarity of the "mercenaries."

For the Brigade to hold on that first day against overwhelming odds and with such slight casualties—less than 100 died that day—was a tribute to the men, also to the invasion area. In that important respect, the plan proved to be correct: Castro's troops had no choice but to come down the highways through the swamps. With tanks, heavy mortars, cannon and bazookas the positions were relatively easy to defend. Only two elements were missing—air cover and ships bringing in sufficient ammunition to keep going.

When it became clear that the Brigade could not win unless Castro's air force was eliminated, the restrictions imposed by Washington on bombing attacks were lifted. By midday the Brigade air force issued this report: "Our infantry forces shot down a Sea Fury and damaged a B-26, leaving the enemy with two jets (the T-33's), two Sea Furies, and one or two B-26 bombers. Our air force has the following missions for today: from 3:30 to 4 p.m. protection of objective zone; at night, six planes will try to destroy rest of the enemy air force."

"The night came and we were expecting the ships," Pepe San Roman said. "Everybody turned to the sea waiting for the ships. We knew that without the ships we could not make it."

On the shore, Roberto Pertierra, the G-4 or supply officer of the Brigade, placed landing lights on the beach and waited with a large group of men to unload the vital supplies.

What Pepe did not know was that the ships had left the area pursued by planes that morning in a desperate, disordered flight for safety, each on its own. Attempts to round them up failed. The *Caribe* went 218 miles south of the Bay of Pigs and was never again available for resupply operations. The other merchant vessel, the *Atlántico*, went 110 miles south and it was not until 4:45 Tuesday afternoon that it returned to a rendezvous 50 miles off the coast.



The first attacks that night came on the eastern San Blas front. Amado Gayol, a short, muscular young student, asked his paratroop commander, Del Valle, if he could move forward to help his comrades at Covadonga. By early evening Gayol reported to the advance unit nine miles north of them on the road to Covadonga. No sooner had he arrived than the sound

of tanks was heard. "We heard the noise of the tanks but we didn't hear what was in front of them." Armored cars with .50-caliber machine guns, followed by infantry, were only yards away when they opened fire. "Some of them were running among us and when I shot I was afraid I was shooting my friends. That was my baptism of fire." The first tank came into range and a Brigade bazooka made a direct hit. When the order to stop firing was given, "we heard the yelling of the wounded. There was a concert of the dying."

Along that front the plan was to resist and fall back, resist and fall back. But the enemy kept coming: they couldn't be stopped without more support. Gayol went back to San Blas and asked Del Valle for assistance. "I told him they were smashing our defenses and our men almost surely would die." By midnight a Brigade truck evacuated the small band in front of Covadonga. Strong Point 2 was crushed. Del Valle called for 4.2 mortars to halt the advancing columns. With three forward observers, Roberto San Roman moved from San Blas to Covadonga. What they saw was terrible! Castro's men were walking down the road, illuminated by the lights of their own trucks, straight into the Brigade mortar fire. It was a massacre. For the rest of the night the 4.2 mortars stopped the advance toward San Blas.

But in halting one advance, Del Valle had left himself open for another. At Yaguaramas, Nestor Pino and his paratroopers had come under mortar fire themselves and moved to a new location where the highway crossed a small key in the middle of a lake. While the enemy kept firing on the old position, Pino placed his men, carefully camouflaged, alongside the road with bazookas and machine guns. At 4 a.m. the first scout car appeared.

"In trying to reach Del Valle on the radio I got the enemy frequency," Pino said. "And I learned they were coming with four infantry battalions with 105-mm. howitzers and two companies of tanks. They were stupid; they didn't use any code; it was plain language over the air." Two companies came, massed and walking straight down the road in columns of four. "I let them come. I called the mortars back for support, but I found that there were no mortars behind us. I don't know why. So I grabbed the phone again and tried to get them. There was no answer."

"When the enemy was 150 yards away we opened fire. Everyone fired pretty good. It was amazing the quantity of people we could hit. They went into the water on either side of the road and it was easy to keep shooting them. I sent a runner a mile back to the 4.2's. He was Manuel Casana. And he came back and said: 'No one is there.' I told him not to say it very loud and don't repeat it to anyone else. I told Casana to try to reach San Blas and say we need support or we can't hold—we need mortars or air support."

At a quarter to 8 the first rumble of artillery was heard at Red Beach, Playa Larga.

Four batteries of Russian-made 122-mm. howitzers had opened fire.

Oliva passed the word to be quiet and stay in the trenches.

Slowly, almost yard by yard, the shelling moved closer. At 9:30 the first barrage hit the Brigade position. No matter what came after, for many men those hours under artillery were the worst. "You feel like running, desperately, but no one runs. They shoot three times, bam . . . bam . . . bam . . . and we count, one, two, three, and blam, blam, blam, they are hitting us." The concussion of the shells grabbed at their clothes. There was a shower of steel. "Ping, ping, ping."

During World War II, Rommel's crack Afrika Corps broke and ran under such an artillery bombardment. They had the desert; the Brigade had only the sea. "It was like being in a plane that is falling down and we had this horrible feeling, pounding, pounding, pounding."

Oliva passed the word to prepare for an attack. In the distance they could hear the sound of engines. The first firing came from the west when two machine guns opened up. Then, from 100 yards in front of him, Cruz saw a Stalin tank at the head of a column of infantry entering the Rotunda. Twenty yards behind it was another tank, and behind that still another. Despite the difference in manpower, the Brigade position was ideal: the enemy could come only through one place and they had to come slowly. Oliva quickly ordered the tank with Acevedo to move to Cruz, and the battle was joined: tank against tank, 20 yards apart, firing point blank. Along the line the firing was intense and the smoke and smell of gunpowder enveloped the

men. The first two Castro tanks were knocked out; the third moved around them. The climax came when the Brigade tank driven by Jorge Alvarez fought *cuerpo a cuerpo* (body to body).

"They were like two prehistoric monsters, firing point-blank at each other, and then actually physically hitting each other," said Felipe Rivero of Avila's company in the Second Battalion. "Then the Russian tank withdrew and ours did, too!"

At 1 o'clock Oliva ordered the mortars to fire for the first time.

Two hours later, and after continual battle, Oliva ordered the mortars to fire white phosphorus grenades.

"The shouting of the enemy at that moment was just like hell," he said. "Everything was on fire. They were completely demoralized because that *sósforo blanco* really burns the skin. It was like a curtain, completely covered with *sósforo blanco*. The tanks and the mortars saved us."

At that moment one of the incredible mischances of war occurred. A soldier from the Fourth Battalion ran toward them shouting that a tank was approaching only yards away. "Is it ours or theirs?" Oliva yelled. Then the tank appeared, stopped and the driver got out and began running toward Torres Mena, vigorously waving his arms. Suddenly, he stopped short, screamed, "It's the enemy," and dashed back to his own tank—a Russian T-34. "I was so surprised that I didn't shoot. None of us shot," Oliva said.

But Torres Mena reacted. He climbed in his tank and from 25 yards, firing his shells by hand, he shot his explosives. There was a VOOM as the shell hit the Russian tank in the middle. For a second the tank turned a bright lobster red; then it was black; then there was a booming explosion and the turret erupted like a volcano as the ammunition began exploding.

It was a night when heroes were made. There was Felipe Rondon, only 16 years old, baby-faced, called the mascot by older men, who stood in the Rotunda with a 57-mm. cannon and faced a tank. When the tank was 10 yards away he fired. The shell pierced the armor, but in the explosion the boy was knocked to the ground and the tank crushed him. There was Gilberto Hernandez, another young boy, who lost an eye at 3 a.m. and continued fighting with his recoilless rifle for another hour until a grenade killed him.

By that time the men were seeing visions. Some saw cars in front of them. One saw two men dancing before his eyes, another saw a large Mexican hat. The fighting continued, but more slowly. At 4:45 Aleman's tank headed back from the Rotunda. He had no more ammunition. Fifteen minutes later Gonzalez Colmenares reported the same. Still the enemy tanks were coming, passing the wreckage and rumbling toward the Brigade. Two more entered the circle in single columns. The first was knocked out by a bazooka. The second advanced but the bazooka men failed to see it in the dark. Cruz stood up and, by firing tracer bullets, outlined the tank's position.

"Many of our men were dead, the rest terribly tired," Acevedo said. "They had no water, no food, nothing. It was a desperate situation. I couldn't support another attack from the enemy so I sent a message to the head of the Battalion [Sueiro], explaining our situation. At that moment we could hear tanks coming. But suddenly, I cannot explain it, the enemy retired. I don't know what happened."

From a prisoner Oliva learned what they had faced—and defeated—that night: 2,100 men—300 regular soldiers, 1,600 militia, and 200 policemen—plus 20 tanks, including Sherman and Stalin tanks.

"I asked him what happened to those 2,100 men," Oliva said, "and he said a lot of them were dead, a lot of them were wounded, and the rest were running back." Of the tanks, five or six were destroyed, several had developed mechanical trouble and the rest had left when they ran out of ammunition. The best available estimate of Castro's casualties that night, from a Castro doctor who later defected, places the dead at 500 with over a thousand wounded.

Oliva's force, numbering less than 370 men, had sustained an almost unbelievably low number of casualties: 40 to 50 wounded, 10 to 20 dead. They were well trained, they massed their fire superbly and they were brilliantly led.

At 5 o'clock Oliva had sent a messenger to Pepe reporting that his situation was desperate. At 6:15 a jeep arrived with Pepe's reply: "Resist until the last moment—the moment of death." Oliva summoned his staff and the two battalion commanders into conference. They were out of ammunition and they expected an even greater attack to follow in the daylight.

Oliva decided that the time had come to withdraw to Giron. The decision was fortunate: Castro had massed a tank company, four howitzer batteries, eight antiaircraft batteries, a battery of 37-mm. cannons, a company of bazookas, a special combat column, a battery of mortars, a police battalion and the 111th Battalion to attack and take Playa Larga.



At dawn six Brigade B-26's, each carrying a full bomb load, were over the San Antonio de los Banos airfield. Fate, destiny, an act of God or simply bad luck intruded, for the target was covered by heavy haze and thick low-lying clouds.

The mission aborted. Castro's small air force was still intact—and still able to range at will over the Brigade.

At 8:45 Oliva arrived at the one-story concrete house beneath the Royal palm trees at the intersection of the roads from the west, north and east that Pepe San Roman had chosen as Brigade headquarters at Giron.

Sometime between 10 and 10:30 in the morning "a man came running like hell," saying radio contact had been made with a ship at the ammunition supply point. Pepe, Oliva, Artime and Ferrer raced to the supply communications post where Orlando Cuervo, a radio operator, excitedly said he had picked up the ship. Faintly, but getting stronger, they could hear a voice on the other end. It was the *Blagar*. The first words from the sea were congratulations to the fighting men of the Brigade for their victory at Playa Larga. The message of congratulations was given in the name of the Cuban Revolutionary Council. "I don't know how they knew about our fighting," Oliva said, "but that is what they said."

Pepe's reply to the voice on the *Blagar* was to call him a son of a whore and report that the troops that had fought in Playa Larga were already in Playa Giron because they had run out of ammunition. He said he didn't need their congratulations; he needed ammunition, medical supplies and support. Then he asked to speak directly to the American task force commander. The commander came to the radio and this is how Pepe remembers the conversation:

Task Force Commander: "Hello, Pepe, how are you? . . ."

Pepe: "Where have you been, you son of a bitch? Where the hell have you been? You have abandoned us."

Task Force Commander: "I know that you have your problems, but I've had mine."

Then Gray, the American frogman, came on the air and said: "Hello, Pepe, I want you to know that we will never abandon you, and if things are very rough there we will go in and evacuate you."

Pepe's exact words, both as written down and as recorded on tape at that time, were: "I will not be evacuated. We will fight to the end here if we have to."

Gray asked what Pepe needed and Pepe replied, "Weapons, bullets, communications, medicine and food."

Gray said, "We will get you all those things tonight. We will go in tonight."

"That's what you said yesterday and you didn't come," Pepe said.

But this time, Gray answered, they were coming for sure. In the next sentence Gray uttered the words that Pepe cannot forget: "Jets are coming." Gray said six jets and several B-26's would be arriving within two hours to support the Brigade; and before the ships returned that night, C-54's would drop supplies.

Pepe turned to the men around him and gave the good news. "Now we will hit them!"

From Pepe's conversation with Gray stems the controversy over the use of United States air power in the Bay of Pigs invasion. Since Pepe immediately informed his battalion commanders that jets were coming and ordered them to place panels to mark the front lines for the planes, everyone in the Brigade soon learned the news. Many soldiers mistakenly interpreted that promise for an even greater commitment and assumed—understandably, but incorrectly—that the United States had pledged its air power from the beginning. In time it came to be accepted as fact that the United States had withheld its power and reneged on its promises. In fact, there is no way of determining by what authority Gray made such a promise: the highest authority holds that it did not come from Washington.

Throughout the afternoon planes swept over Giron—but they were Castro's. Then, at 6 o'clock, artillery began to hit the small town and on the east and west advance guards of Castro's troops began to engage the Brigade. At San Blas, where the

...my was attacking heavily, only two tanks and acts of individual heroism saved the Brigade from annihilation.

For some reason, however, an attack did not come that day and the men slept fitfully by their weapons, denied even one night's sleep because of the land crabs that swarmed over the ground where they lay.

The fighting that Tuesday night at Giron was limited principally to skirmishes with infiltrating militia. The relative quiet gave Oliva and Ferrer an opportunity to study the maps and plan their defenses while Pepe continued speaking over the radio with Gray. Late that night Pepe again lost contact with the *Blagar*.

When Pepe lost communications with the *Blagar*, he assumed the Americans had given up trying to help him. In actual fact, the *Blagar* and *Barbara J* were working frantically against a number of formidable obstacles: the reluctance of the crews to go back; time itself; lack of air support to cover the unloading of equipment at the beach; and uncertainty in Washington about what could be done to save the operation.

Air cover was again a key. The messages from the *Blagar* to Nicaragua that night succinctly spelled out the problem. One read: BARRACUDA, MARSOPA (code names for the *Barbara J* and *Blagar*) CANNOT ARRIVE BLUE BEACH DISCHARGE AND LEAVE BY DAYLIGHT. REQUEST JET COVER FOR US IN BEACHHEAD AREA. TWO hours and thirty-eight minutes later: MARSOPA PROCEEDING BLUE BEACH WITH 3 LCUS. IF LOW JET COVER NOT FURNISHED AT FIRST LIGHT BELIEVE WE WILL LOSE ALL SHIPS. REQUEST IMMEDIATE REPLY.

The granting of such a request could come only from one man: John F. Kennedy.

It must have been a day of frustration and anguish for John Fitzgerald Kennedy. The news from the front continued to grow blacker. Moreover, there was the threat that Russia might act.

Khrushchev had made that clear in a special message to the President that morning. Written, the Premier said, "at an hour of anxiety fraught with danger to world peace," it stated the Soviet position in chilling terms. "It is not a secret to anyone that the armed bands which invaded that country have been trained, equipped and armed in the United States of America. The planes which bomb Cuban cities belong to the United States of America, the bombs they drop have been made available by the American Government. . . . As to the Soviet Union, there should be no misunderstanding of our position: we shall render the Cuban people and their Government all necessary assistance in beating back the armed attack on Cuba. We are sincerely interested in a relaxation of international tension, but if others aggravate it, we shall reply in full measure."

The President himself dictated the reply. It was temperate but firm, and clearly and precisely worded. The Premier was under a "serious misapprehension" about Cuba, for there were "unmistakable signs that Cubans found intolerable the denial of democratic liberties and the subversion of the 26 of July Movement by an alien-dominated regime." The President had stated before—and he stated again—that "the United States intends no military intervention in Cuba." But should an outside force intervene "we will immediately honor our obligations under the inter-American system to protect this hemisphere against external aggression." The President trusted that the Premier would not use Cuba as a pretext "to inflame other areas of the world," for he hoped the Soviet Union had "too great a sense of responsibility to embark upon any enterprise so dangerous to general peace." The President's message ended with a statement of principle: "I believe, Mr. Chairman, that you should recognize that free people in all parts of the world do not accept the claim of historical inevitability for communist revolution. What your Government believes is its own business; what it does in the world is the world's business. The great revolution in the history of man, past, present and future, is the revolution of those determined to be free."

Before 7 p.m., less than 10 hours after Khrushchev's message was received, the President's reply was handed to Mikhail A. Menshikov, the Soviet Ambassador to the United States.

Until nearly 10 o'clock the President lingered in his office, ignoring the reminders of his staff that he had to prepare for the reception for his Cabinet and members of Congress and their wives and guests. At the last minute he put on white tie and tails and at 10:15 he and Mrs. Kennedy walked down the main stairs into the entrance hall. As the Marine band, resplendent in red dress uniforms, played *Mr. Wonderful*, the President and First

Lady whirled around the ballroom, the picture of youth and confidence. For an hour and a half the President mingled with his guests, a gracious host and charming President.

Shortly before the clock struck midnight, the President left the reception and went immediately to his office. Rusk, McNamara, Bissell, Lemnitzer and Burke were present. Bissell, quietly and calmly, presented the case and the request: the Brigade had only one hope left—United States air power.

Of those hours of deliberation from midnight until 2 a.m., there have been several accounts. It can be stated from the highest sources, however, that the essence of the debate was this: Dean Rusk vigorously opposed the use of American power; Arleigh Burke strongly backed Richard Bissell; and John Kennedy ruled out any major use of American arms. The President did, however, for the first time, alter his policy on the use of United States forces. In a compromise, but one with a reasonable chance of success, he gave the authority for jet fighter planes from the carrier *U.S.S. Essex*, on duty in the Caribbean off the Bay of Pigs, to provide an "air umbrella" Wednesday at dawn while the B-26's from Puerto Cabezas struck hard at Castro's forces and the *Blagar*, the *Barbara J* and three LCU's unloaded the vital supplies at Giron. The military order went out. It clattered over the teletype machine in the small operations room at Puerto Cabezas. ON D+2 (WEDNESDAY) FROM 0630 TO 0730 THE SKY WILL BE CLEAR. The jet air cover request was granted.

His decision made and the orders given, Kennedy walked alone into the White House garden.



Since Sunday night the Cuban B-26 pilots had been flying around the clock on what had become virtual suicide missions. By Wednesday morning nine of the 16 B-26's had been shot down, and several of the remaining planes were in poor flying condition. When the pilots were called to the briefing room at Puerto Cabezas early that morning to receive their missions, some of them refused to continue flying without the assurance of air support. Oscar Vega was one of them.

Four American advisors, knowing that the order had been received pledging United States jet support, volunteered to fly for the exhausted Cubans. Riley W. Shamburger, Jr., Wade C. Gray, Thomas Willard Ray and Lee F. Baker were casual and confident as they got into two of the B-26's—two in each plane—wearing tan shorts. Their planes, and two others flown by Vega and Gonzalo Herrera, both of whom finally agreed to go, took off for the three-hour-and-20-minute flight to the Bay of Pigs. Vega's right engine developed trouble and he had to turn back. The others flew on.

In the first light of the day, the B-26's were approaching their target—nearly one hour before their jet support was supposed to arrive at 6:30. Why they arrived at Giron an hour early is not clear, but the result was disastrous: the U.S. jets were still on the carrier deck when the planes flown by the Americans were attacked by Castro's jets. One B-26 was shot down and crashed-landed in flames on the air strip at the Central Australia sugar mill. The other fell into the sea enveloped in flames and smoke. The four Americans died.

Gonzalo Herrera, who had heard his American comrades vainly calling the distress signal "Mad Dog Four! May Day! May Day!" to get carrier support, proceeded on to his target: enemy troop and artillery concentrations massed in front of San Blas. The Brigade troops had been under heavy artillery fire all night and Castro's forces were ready for a massive attack when Herrera's plane dived, strafed the position with machine guns, turned, made a second pass and dropped two napalm bombs. After the tremendous explosion, there was deep silence.

Herrera headed toward the sea but was attacked and hit. With one engine out and 37 hits in his fuselage, he skimmed low over the water all the way back to Nicaragua and landed safely at Puerto Cabezas. His was the last shot fired by the Brigade air force. Since their mission was to provide an "umbrella" for the Brigade B-26 bombers, after the bombers were shot down the American jets never left the *Essex*. Without the protective air cover, the supply ships did not hazard the unloading at dawn.

Twenty-two years old, handsome, blond, athletic and cocky, Alejandro del Valle was an inspiration to his men. When, at about 6 a.m., Gonzalo Herrera's plane flew away from the San Blas front, Del Valle took advantage of the confusion Herrera's attack had created among the enemy. He organized

counterattack with his paratroopers and the Third Battalion. Standing on top of one of his two tanks, Del Valle signaled for the attack. The men moved forward under a heavy artillery barrage, some walking dazedly, others running, but all going ahead. To the forward observers, watching through binoculars, it was like a picture: the lines of men, the bright blue sky and the early morning sun, the puffs of smoke and earth rising from the craters, the flash of small arms fire and the blue uniforms of the enemy. Del Valle was hit and knocked from the tank. He immediately climbed back.

It was a gallant, forlorn, even foolhardy attack—and yet it was succeeding. Castro's vastly superior forces broke and ran. Some enemy soldiers tore off their shirts and waved them in surrender. That moment marked a crest for the Brigade. For a few fleeting seconds the liberation army felt victorious. And then the attack faltered, stopped and the men retreated.

The retreat became disorganized. A few of the paratroopers joined their ranks and the retreat threatened to become a rout. In rage and with tears in his eyes, Del Valle ran among the men trying to stop them, shouting: "All paratroopers back to the line and die there." He repeated it over and over. His men regrouped and formed a line on the sides of the road, placed their bazookas, and waited, two miles south of San Blas.

Del Valle reported to Pepe San Roman that the Third Battalion was retreating in a disorganized manner and the commanders were not in control of the men. Pepe immediately ordered the first- and second-in-command, Noelio Montero Diaz and Dagoberto Darias, relieved of duty, and sent word by Del Valle to his (Pepe's) brother Roberto to assume command of the Third Battalion and "fight until you don't have anything left to fight with."

At 10 o'clock Castro's troops entered San Blas, and by 11 o'clock were approaching the last defenses blocking the road to Giron.

The first tank, an American-made Sherman T-34, turned the bend in the road and Valdes knocked it out with his bazooka. "I hit it! I hit it!" he shouted, jumping up and down. A second tank, a Stalin, approached, and Valdes destroyed it. A third tank came and a .57 recoilless rifle shot struck the turret, killing the tank commander. The tank retreated and small arms fire began between Castro's militia, in their blue uniforms, and what was left of the Brigade on the San Blas front. Step by step, the paratroopers, the Third Battalion and the two Brigade tanks were beaten back. Their ammunition was nearly expended. By 2 o'clock Castro's tanks had formed a solid line and were firing straight into the Brigade position.

Deciding to retreat, Roberto San Roman and his men began walking down the road 15 miles back to Giron. Before long a jeep came moving fast down the road from behind them with 11 or 12 men packed on so that the jeep itself was hardly distinguishable. It was Del Valle. Roberto was pulled onto the jeep and they drove on, passing Brigade soldiers trudging toward the beach. In the distance they could see smoke and flames rising from Giron.

At Giron, Pepe San Roman resumed his radio contact with Gray on the *Blagar* that morning. Better than anything, the stark words sent out over the airwaves to the *Blagar* told the story of the disaster that was overtaking the Brigade. The radio log kept on the *Blagar* reads as follows:

- 5:00 a.m. Do you people realize how desperate the situation is? Do you back us or quit? All we want is low jet air cover. Enemy has this support. I need it badly or cannot survive. . .
- 6:13 a.m. Blue Beach under attack by B-26. Where is promised air cover? Pepe.
- 6:42 a.m. C-54 dropped supplies on Blue Beach. All went into sea. Send more. Pepe.
- 7:12 a.m. Enemy on trucks coming from Red Beach are right now 3 km. from Blue Beach. Pepe.
- 7:50 a.m. We are fighting in the west flank of Blue Beach with tanks. Pepe.
- 8:15 a.m. Situation critical left flank west Blue Beach. Need urgently air support. Pepe.
- 8:40 a.m. Blue Beach is under air attack. Pepe.
- 9:14 a.m. Blue Beach is under attack by two T-33's and artillery. Where the hell is jet cover? Pepe.
- 9:25 a.m. 2000 militia attacking Blue Beach from east and west. Need close air support immediately. Pepe.
- 9:55 a.m. Can you throw something into this vital point in the battle? Anything. Just let jet pilots loose. Pepe.

Toward the end messages came quickly: "In water. Out of

ammo. Enemy closing in. Help must arrive in next hour." "Fighting on beach. Send all available aircraft now."

Through all the chaos and despair of defeat, Pepe retained the calm that was his hallmark. Even his anger was quiet; he was not a pounder or a shouter. Those who heard him on the radio that day, and many on the convoy off the Bay of Pigs did, heard the quiet voice, sounding more tired, edged more with anger and bitterness but still determined and still calm.

The nature of John F. Kennedy's personal feelings is reflected in part by the orders that went out from Washington that day. They indicate how close the United States came to a total commitment.

First, CINCLANT (Commander-in-Chief, Atlantic) was instructed to fly reconnaissance missions over the beach and to send two destroyers to positions off Playa Giron to determine the possibilities for evacuation. Two hours and 52 minutes later, in midafternoon, CINCLANT received these instructions: "Have destroyers take Brigade personnel off beach to limit capture. Navy use Brigade boats and craft as practicable and provide air cover. Destroyers authorized to return fire if fired on during this humanitarian mission."



The last battle had an epic quality all the more tragic because it was so hopeless. It did not affect the outcome or even add a footnote to history. It was merely another moment when men tried against great odds and failed.

At 9:45 a.m. the enemy began to move forward and the Brigade 4.2's opened fire. This time Castro's troops, despite their losses, continued to advance and at 10 o'clock the first tank came through the curve. "We cut his head." An armored truck came next and Enrique Garcia destroyed it with a bazooka. Another tank came around the curve, advanced 50 yards more than the other and then it, too, was hit and blown up. A third tank came and was destroyed.

It was only the beginning of the infantry assaults. As he had done at Playa Larga, Oliva called for white phosphorus. For an hour the tanks, the infantry and the mortars fired continuously. In Julio Diaz Arguelles' 81-mm. mortar squad the men were firing so rapidly the mortars actually began melting. When the enemy retreated it was 12:30 p.m. and Oliva had lost radio contact with Pepe. A truck with bazooka and .50-caliber ammunition arrived from Giron. Shortly after that a car came from the enemy lines with two militiamen who wanted to surrender. They told Oliva their commander had betrayed them by sending them into slaughter and that Osmani Cienfuegos was leading a column of 3,000 men toward them. And, they said, Fidel Castro was already in Playa Larga.

Oliva brought the Second Battalion into position. It was 1:30 p.m. By 2 o'clock artillery shells were landing behind them. Then one struck the second tank in line. Elio Aleman, the second in command of the Brigade's tank company, died instantly. Gonzalo Carmentate, the commander of the first tank, shouted that an enemy tank was concealed between the three destroyed tanks in the curve. He fired his own gun and knocked out the enemy with one shot. But Aleman's tank was in flames, between the two others loaded with ammunition. A disastrous explosion was imminent.

"The boys got fire extinguishers from the tanks but it wasn't sufficient," Oliva said. "I shouted to the tank crew that someone had to take the tank out of there."

Jorge Alvarez, called the "little egg" by his comrades, ran from his own tank, climbed into the burning vehicle and drove away, with flames shooting up from the back and smoke pouring from the top.

"I thought that man would never come back," Oliva said, "but 15 minutes later he came running into the line and back to his own tank. I told him he was promoted to captain. It was illogical but in a moment like that it was the only thing I could tell a man who had done such a thing."

The infantry was now upon them in hand-to-hand combat. Their small forces were almost overwhelmed. Oliva called for Pedro Avila's Company G of the Second Battalion to counterattack on the left flank. Company G advanced into woods and tangled vegetation so thick they could not see the enemy in front of them. They moved forward into intense fire from machine guns and Czech grease guns. "You could see the branches break and the sap falling down and imagine what it was if it was your arm or leg," a soldier said.

In a stupor of weariness, tormented by thirst and the heat of the day, the men fought on. The cries of the wounded rose in

the woods, along with the shouts for water. "The only thing that you could hear in the air was bullets and more bullets," another soldier said, "and you holler to hell and nobody answers. In the battle you are not you, you are something else, you are an animal. You kill or you get killed. That's what they told us in Guatemala and that's the way it was."

Oliva ordered his men to fall back 200 yards into trenches. But by this time the mortars were out of ammunition; calamity seemed inevitable.

LAST MESSAGE FROM PEPE. TO 2AW FLASH.

QUOTE. AM DESTROYING ALL MY EQUIPMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS. TANKS ARE IN SIGHT. I HAVE NOTHING TO FIGHT WITH. AM TAKING TO THE WOODS. I CANNOT WAIT FOR YOU. UNQUOTE.

Until the end they did not know they were beaten. They had walked back toward Giron, dirty and tired, throwing away their packs and shovels in the heat, but still hoping that something would happen.

"When I saw Giron it was the first time I realized that we had lost the war," a soldier said. "People without morale, people who didn't know what to do, people who were trying to get away." To another the sight of the shattered buildings and stripped trees—"as though a hurricane had passed"—and the confusion on the beach resembled "that picture you call Dunkirk."

Oliva had waited in his last lines of resistance for the final attack. But strangely there was a sudden unnerving calm on the battlefield.

What Oliva did not know was that Castro's forces had spotted the American destroyers coming fast toward Giron and had halted their advance on all fronts, not daring to move ahead if the Americans were going to land. From the beginning, too, Castro had miscalculated the Brigade forces. He assumed, from the casualties his men had suffered and from the continued fierce opposition, that the Brigade was still solidly entrenched and able to give battle. He also thought he was facing from five to eight thousand men. Not until 6 p.m. did his troops enter Giron. Had they gone forward at 4 o'clock San Roman is convinced that at least 60 percent of the Brigade would have died, "60 percent, you can be sure of that." But Castro waited and once more enabled the Brigade to escape.

The wounded Maximo Cruz crawled out of the infirmary and saw the American destroyers still moving toward the coast. He yelled to Padre Lugo who was walking away, "Father, Father. Don't leave. Here are the Americans. They have come to save us." As he was speaking, two artillery shells landed in front of the ships. The ships turned and left.

The frustration and rage poured out. Soldiers ran to a tank to try and shoot at the destroyers. Their hatred spilled over onto their own men. Brigade soldiers fired rifles trying to hit those who were leaving on a sailboat and rubber rafts. They were the final shots in the Bay of Pigs invasion. A soldier watching the last American ship said: "In the wake of that ship goes 200 years of infamy."

Oliva and his men blew up their tanks, shot their truck tires and destroyed their heavy equipment. Then they began marching in a column to the east. They had walked only 500 yards when two T-33's and a Sea Fury attacked them. When one of the planes dived low, a soldier saw the Cuban flag on its wings. He felt, horribly, like an outlaw in his own land. The column broke and the men ran into the jungle. It was every man for himself.



When the battle was over, what Churchill calls the "terrible Ifs" began to accumulate.

If the underground had been alerted in time and had launched a major sabotage campaign; if the second bombing raid on Monday had not been canceled; if the landing area had been explored and charted in advance; if the military landing craft had been used instead of boats with outboard motors; if the military experts had recognized how damaging an unopposed T-33 jet trainer could be when armed with rockets; if fighter planes had accompanied the B-26's; if the Brigade had been trained to take alternative action as guerrillas; if the landing area had been adaptable for guerrilla action; if President Kennedy had not publicly stated that the United States would not intervene; if clouds had not obscured the target over San Antonio de los Baños Tuesday morning; if the B-26's had not been an hour early at Giron Wednesday morning; if so vast a majority of the mandatory supplies had not been loaded on the

lost *Rio Escondido*; if the ships had succeeded in unloading the supplies; if the convoy had not fled so far and had been in time to land help; and the final, tantalizing "if"—if all these had taken place, would the Brigade have won?

At the moment of defeat there were no answers—only questions.

In a house near the sea where Enrique Ruiz-Williams and others lay wounded, they were suddenly confronted by the person of Fidel Castro. Williams, carrying 70 wounds, both minor and major, recognized him at once. He groped under his thin mattress and tried to reach a .45 pistol he had concealed there earlier in the afternoon. Williams does not know whether he really drew the gun and pulled the trigger and the pistol did not go off, or whether he simply made the gesture and failed to get the weapon. Those lying there with him are certain only that he made such a gesture. All agree, however, on what happened next.

Castro said, "What are you trying to do, kill me?" and Williams replied, "That's what I came here for. We've been trying to do that for three days." Castro was not angry.

A militia police captain reached down and patted Williams and said, "Take it easy. Take it easy. You're in bad shape."

Castro asked, "Is there an American here?" and snapped a flashlight into the faces of the wounded men in the room. The door had been blown off its hinges during the bombing that afternoon. He reached down, picked it up and uncovered a body. "This man is dead," Castro said. He dropped the door. Then Castro gave orders: "These men can't stay here. Take them to Covadonga and put them in the hospital."



For three days the Brigade had fought without rest and with little food or water. Then, in small groups, afraid to stop, almost too tired to go on, numb and bitter from defeat, they crawled through the swamps—trying to get through to the mountains, to a town or finally to firm ground. A very few made it.

Constantly overhead was the whirring sound of Castro's helicopters and the monotonous and continual burst of his machine guns firing aimlessly into the woods, everywhere and anywhere. Artillery shells raked the area and the few roads through the swamps were swarming with patrols. Castro's men made no effort to go after the Brigade; the Brigade had to come to them.

Giron was a scene of confusion: long lines of soldiers, jeeps and trucks and buses; nurses and officers; newspapermen, television cameramen and photographers; and Chinese, Czechs and Russians in civilian clothes—all moving about with a sense of importance. The center of attention, the objects of scorn and shouts, were the prisoners. Dirty, disheveled, gaunt, unshaven, most wearing only the T-shirts and pants their captors had left them, they came into the town in long lines, bound together, poked by bayonets. They were silent and grim.

The prisoners were lined up in a single file late in the morning and waited until their names were called to get aboard a large trailer truck for the trip to Havana. Standing beside the truck, in charge of the operation, was Osmani Cienfuegos, the Minister of Public Works. Calling the names was Fernandez Vila, an agrarian reform institute official.

Cienfuegos was taunting the men as they got aboard: they were cowards, *latifundistas* (large land owners), *Batistianos*, mercenaries.

By the time 100 men had been packed into the truck the prisoners were shouting, "No more. No more. We can't breathe." Cienfuegos was unmoved. Maximo Cruz' name was called and now even Vila was concerned by the shouts from inside the truck.

"Sir," Vila protested, "we can't put any more in. They will die."

Cienfuegos' reply is burned into the memory of those men. "Let them die! It will save us from shooting them."

He waved his arm and ordered "forty more pigs" put on the truck.

When there were 149 men on the truck, the two doors were closed and bolted and the trip began. It was 1 o'clock of a hot, sunny afternoon. In the total darkness inside there was panic: men shouting, packed solidly against each other, desperately struggling for air. "It was the terrible heat," one man said. "Sweat ran like a river."

Terrified, the men ripped off their clothes and beat on the walls with their fists and rocked the truck, vainly trying to turn

it over—anything to stop it. From everywhere came shouts and screams: "Oh, my god! I have no air! I have no air! I am going to die!" To one man, it was "like Dante's inferno"; to another, "it was an enemy you couldn't fight. I'd much rather be shot." With belt buckles they scratched and clawed on the aluminum walls until they succeeded in making a few holes, measuring from a quarter of an inch to two inches long. They fought for the chance to reach these holes and the air. "When you are going to die," one said, "the first is a very deep sleep. If you sleep, you die." When a man began to pass out, he was grabbed and placed in front of one of the holes until he revived and then another would take his place. On and on the truck drove, never stopping. From time to time, when the driver applied his brakes, the sloshing of sweat on the floor could be heard. When the sun went down, moisture on the walls and ceiling condensed and "it began to rain for us." Men began to die.

Eight hours after they left Giron the truck stopped. When it did the pounding and shouting increased. From outside the prisoners heard voices ordering them to be quiet or the doors would not be opened. For what seemed an eternity they were quiet. Then the doors were opened. The prisoners staggered out, falling "like leaves," stumbling over their comrades, their faces turned black, yellow, gray. Nine men were dead. Another died after he was taken outside.

The Brigade had reached Havana.

Captivity began with 20 days that were centuries.

Tired, angry, bitter, uncertain of the future, the prisoners were brought to *El Palacio de los Deportes* (the Sports Palace) in the center of Havana. There in the amphitheatre they sat in rows on hard, small chairs for more than 21 hours a day, 1,000 men from the demoralized Brigade. It was the low point.

They were separated by battalions, each sitting apart. While the food was adequate, they were not permitted to move or even stretch their legs. They sat in the chairs, some wounded, covered by the filth of battle and the days in the swamps. They had to beg for permission to go to the toilets.

Already exhausted when they were taken prisoner, their continued lack of sleep made them numb and dizzy. From 3 until 6 in the morning they were permitted to lie on the floor on dirty mattresses, where they could look up at the bright lights on the ceiling. In their fevered, dispirited state, some of the men felt as though they were in a vast operating room.

Their captors played on their fears and bitterness and planned an extravaganza that would prove to the world the duplicity of the United States. Carefully selected prisoners were to be questioned before a television panel. Some were weak and had promised to say whatever their captors wished; others were chosen to prove Castro's thesis that the Brigade was composed of the sons of the rich and war criminals. The wealthiest among the Brigade were selected to indicate the Brigade's political leadership. Castro's greatest triumph, however, came when he was able to put three genuine Batista war criminals before the cameras, Ramon Calvino, Rafael Soler Puig and Jorge King Yun. The most notorious was Calvino, who had tortured and raped a woman and murdered two men. Calvino was in the group of sailors that swam ashore when their ships were sunk. Although Calvino was *not* in the Brigade, once ashore he had fought until he was wounded and captured. More than anything else, his presence with the invaders permitted Castro to damn the Brigade as a mercenary force.

For four nights, the parade of prisoners on television continued, until 37 men had been interrogated at length. Despite the staging and selection, the propaganda show proved to be a mixed blessing for Castro. Some of the prisoners were abject, as the communists expected, and some conceded their mistakes. "I am completely sorry for what has happened," Father Segundo de las Heras said, "and I ask the Cuban nation to accept my sorrow. I am ready to do anything I can to make up for what happened."

But others spoke up bravely. "If you have so many people on your side, why don't you hold elections?" asked Carlos Varona.

And Fabio Freyre, a cattleman from Oriente, when asked why he came to fight, replied, "Because I want in my country the establishment of the 1940 Constitution, a democratic government with free press and elections so the people can choose their own government."

No one in the Brigade felt more embittered about the defeat than Pepe San Roman. When his turn came to make the trip to Havana, Pepe was crowded into a bus filled with prisoners.

At the Central Highway of Cuba, running east and west the length of the island, he remembered the words of Frank in Nicaragua. As the bus made a left turn onto the highway, "I put my left hand out like Frank told us to. I put my hand out and we went straight into Havana."

Artime was not taken until his 14th day in the swamps. Like some of the other men, he had eaten small birds and he had found some water early. Toward the end, however, "The feeling of thirst was very strong and we could not move our tongues to talk."

His captors did not recognize Artime, but they confiscated a diary he had kept since he had gone into exile. At Giron he was given something to eat and drink. A man named Oscar Fernandez, a Castro doctor whom Artime had known in school, saw him and said, "Artime! So you could not escape. You are very unlucky." He was immediately separated from the others, bound and thrown on the floor and left alone. An old militiaman quietly spread his own coat over Artime's shoulders, and Artime slept until he was awakened by a kick. "When I opened my eyes, what I saw made my hair stand up."

Manuel Pineiro, a big man known to Cubans as "Barbarroja" because of his long, bristling, bright red beard, was standing over him, along with Pedro Luis Rodriguez and Ramiro Valdes, the chief of Castro's G-2. All three were communists from the old guard.

Barbarroja was the first to speak. "Artime, you are the son of a bitch that has caused us more trouble and made us more harm than anyone else. Now you are going to pay for everything you've done to us." They took him by car to Havana.

In the Sports Palace he was put in a separate cell, questioned briefly and left alone. In the middle of the night Pedro Luis Rodriguez and Osmani Cienfuegos took him away in a car. When it stopped "we went down some stairs that looked like they were to a basement. We went into a room that had mattresses all over the walls. There was a chair on the floor and in front were three rocking chairs and I saw a couple of spotlights, but they were not on. To impress me there were two guys that had no shirts, big and fat." They took off Artime's shirt and strapped him in the chair—by the legs and around the shoulders and waist. His hands were tied behind him. The spotlights were turned on in Artime's face and the interrogation began.

Artime does not know how long he was kept there. He thinks it might have been as long as three days, but he is not certain.

The interrogation droned on until Artime almost lost his senses. For the first time, he prayed to God to kill him quickly. Twice his captors said they were going to shoot him. The muzzle of a pistol was placed in his mouth and the trigger pulled; the hammer fell on an empty chamber. The other time they placed a pistol against his temple. Once Artime begged for water and a voice said, "Yes, I'll give you some water," and he was slapped hard across the mouth. When he passed out, he was brought back to consciousness—by ice water or with lighted cigarettes. He carries scars with him today.

For the first few days Oliva was held apart from the Brigade, with other battalion commanders and staff officers. Then he was transferred to a cell occupied by more than 30 men—civilians, members of the Brigade's infiltration teams and soldiers. Then on May 4 Oliva and six others of the Brigade headquarters staff were told they were going to be shot. Instead, they were taken back to the Sports Palace.

"It was very emotional when they took us there," Oliva said, "because all the people of the Brigade stood up and started applauding us. A militiaman took me to an upper room and there I met Barbarroja and Pedro Luis [Rodriguez], a captain that was in charge of our case." He was questioned about the invasion and about why he had left Cuba, but was not mistreated. When the questioning was over, he was taken to a small cell, similar to Pepe's. On May 14 Oliva was taken from his cell and down an elevator to the first floor. When he stepped out he saw that the Sports Palace was empty—not a member of the Brigade was left.



In Washington an investigation into what had happened at the Bay of Pigs got under way on April 23. The President appointed his brother, Robert F. Kennedy, and Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor to head a committee of inquiry. Allen Dulles and Adm. Arleigh Burke were the other members of the committee. It was an investigation of far-reaching significance. That some-

thing was seriously wrong, and that the nation's very survival might depend on uncovering and correcting weaknesses was apparent to everyone involved.

In the second week of May Roberto San Roman, who had escaped from the beach in a sailboat, was released from the Naval Hospital in New Orleans and taken back to his family in Miami. A day or two later two CIA agents came to his house and said they wanted him to go to Washington with four other Brigade members.

"When we got to Washington there were two more CIA men waiting for us, Jack and Joe, very nice people," Roberto said. "They took us to a house near McLean, Virginia, where we had everything we wanted. That morning I saw Frank and Seabee and people from the camp. Frank was very mad for what had happened. In his own words he said, 'Don't you ever accept any job from the CIA again.' He said that, and I don't know why, because I don't think all the blame is to the CIA.

"He said he had gone before the committee already and that he had been rough. He said everything he had on his mind. He told me this would be my only chance and I should say everything—feel free to talk and to ask. And that is exactly what I did!"

The five Cubans were taken to the Pentagon by "Jack and Joe." Gray and Rip, the two American frogmen, preceded them. Roberto was the first man in the Brigade to be called. Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor and Robert Kennedy were leading the questioning. Behind them was a large map with the area of operations at the Bay of Pigs.

"They wanted to know," Roberto said, "the reaction of the enemy, how soon they reacted with tanks and artillery. How much did they fire and how much did we fire? How many did we kill and how many men of ours died? The reaction of the population—and this was a question of Mr. Kennedy—he wanted to know the reaction of the people. They wanted to know if we thought we could have won the battle. What did we need to win the battle? I told them we needed only three or four jet planes, that's what we needed to win. Three or four jet planes that could knock out the little air force that Castro had at that time. I told them I didn't know how they could do this to us. Our troops were so good—because they involved people from every class, rich and poor, rebels and soldiers and everybody together against the common enemy—and they didn't answer those questions.

"General Taylor was very interested in the steps of the combat. He wanted to know when we advanced, when we retreated, why we retreated and how many men joined us from the civilian population. I think it was Robert Kennedy who asked what we were promised during the briefing in Nicaragua. I think he meant support, what kind of support. And then I said that we were never told by any uniformed man of the U.S. armed forces that we would have this battalion or this air force squadron supporting us but that during the briefing, as in the training, they let us believe things."

Roberto spoke at length about what Frank had said to them and how "we thought if we needed air fire support, we would have it." When he first mentioned Frank, General Taylor asked, "Who is this Frank?" and Allen Dulles said, "Colonel Frank _____."

The other Cubans were called in one by one, but for much briefer periods of time. When Blas Casares, a frogman who had been on the flagship *Blagar*, was questioned, the committee seemed particularly interested in the Cuban fleet.

"At the end," Casares said, "they asked me if I wanted to say anything of my own, and at that moment I felt very bitter and I told them I didn't know who planned the invasion, but whoever planned it, I believed he was crazy. They laughed a little bit, all except Dulles. He just looked right through me. That is the only way I can describe it."

The next morning the men were taken to the White House and into President Kennedy's oval office. Roberto San Roman spoke for them all and gave the President a short account of the battle. The President was gracious, considerate and apologetic. He wanted them to know that he was taking all the blame for the failure, and he talked about the future of Latin America and the contest for democracy and freedom in the hemisphere.

That night the Cubans were invited to a party in their honor at Hickory Hill, the country home of Robert Kennedy in McLean, Virginia. Everyone was solicitous and friendly. But the most lasting impression, at least on Roberto San Roman, was

made by Ethel Kennedy, the Attorney General's wife.

"I thought they took us there to forget about the invasion," Roberto said, "but she was the one that talked about it. She kept asking me questions and putting Mr. Kennedy in a very rough situation. She said she had read about the invasion and she asked me if it was true that with some planes we could have won. I told her yes and explained. I thought they were going to avoid this point, but that was the point that she talked about first. She is a wonderful woman."



From the Cubans and from the Americans who had been on the scene, the committee quickly determined that Brigade 2506 had fought with extraordinary courage under extremely difficult conditions. Yet the very courage and determination of the men tended to obscure some more basic aspects of the invasion. The deeper the committee delved, the more apparent it became that the entire operation had been poorly planned. Two of the most glaring miscalculations concerned Castro's air and ground forces. Castro's army was far stronger and fought more fiercely than anyone had anticipated. Consequently, the Brigade would have needed many more men—perhaps 10,000, perhaps 20,000—to accomplish its mission. Added to this was the erroneous belief that the Brigade B-26's would control the air and enable the men to operate at will on the ground. Another miscalculation was obvious: there had been no uprising, no mass defections from Castro's forces. And the CIA's alternative plan for the Brigade had not been employed.

None of the Cubans knew anything about an alternative plan. It was discovered that the plan had not been given them at their briefing in Puerto Cabezas. At the time of the investigation in May of 1961, the CIA contended that Pepe and Oliva had been told privately by Frank about the guerrilla option just before the ships left. Since Pepe and Oliva were then in prison, the committee had no way of establishing the real facts in the case. Examination *did* show that the CIA had shied away from any talk of guerrilla warfare or alternative action because it might weaken the resolve of the Cubans to keep fighting.

These points were fairly easily determined; but there were deeper, even more important, considerations. How was it possible that such a plan could have been approved by the leading military minds of the country? How was it possible that some of the most intelligent men in the executive department failed to spot and counsel against such obvious shortcomings? The implications were grave.

Everywhere President Kennedy turned he could find those responsible: the military had failed, his own advisors had failed and he himself had failed, after only 90 days in office.

Throughout the entire planning for the Bay of Pigs invasion there had been an air of unreality, of vagueness, of unjustified confidence. The desire to conceal the fact of United States support led to a number of compromises: the landing at night, the canceling of the second air strike on Monday, the reluctance to act decisively when disaster approached and an apparent refusal to recognize how disastrous a defeat would be—not only to the cause of Cuban freedom and democracy in the hemisphere, but to the United States and its role as the leader of the West. One of the harshest and most accurate judgments was made immediately after the defeat when one of the leading participants told Stewart Alsop: "The trouble was that we were acting like an old whore and trying to pretend that we were just the sweet young girl we used to be."

In the assignment of responsibility for the failure the military, and specifically, the Joint Chiefs of Staff carries a heavy burden. They selected the Bay of Pigs-Zapata Swamp area for the invasion, and they did so taking into account the alternative plan for guerrilla action. If that area was unsuited to a guerrilla operation, and it most certainly was—they must take the blame on the blunder. They blundered, too, in failing to recognize how devastating the T-33 jet trainers could be in battle when armed with rockets. The result of that failure led to the virtual destruction of the Brigade air force and the loss of the supply ships. But in the larger sense the military bore less responsibility in the overall Bay of Pigs operation than the CIA. And, finally, the responsibility must rest with the CIA.

The CIA, by its nature, remains in the shadows: it lends itself to the role of the villain, however frayed the cloak and however bent the dagger. Even this is not a fair generalization: the CIA has brilliant, dedicated men and women who perform thankless and dangerous jobs throughout the world that help

to safeguard the United States and the free world. It is a cliché of the agency that its successes never get reported and its U-2 flights and Bay of Pigs invasions become *causes célèbres*. The CIA is necessary for the survival of the United States and it shall remain necessary for as long a time as can be anticipated. Acknowledging these as truths, however, does not make the CIA sacrosanct, nor does it relieve the agency of its responsibilities or hide the dangers that are inherent in such an organization.

The gathering of intelligence, with all that is implied in that general term, is the lifeblood of the agency. However, in the Cuban invasion the CIA went far beyond this function. The CIA's men in the field tended to take matters into their own hands, to cross over the line from intelligence to the formation of policy. They acted for the United States—or implied that they did—when dealing with the Cubans and led them to believe much that was not true. Later there was no way for the Cubans to prove they had been promised anything. In American terminology, they were left holding the bag.

Out of the wreckage of the Bay of Pigs came invaluable lessons. Perhaps the most important dealt with the subjective analysis of facts leading to decisions. No matter how great the adviser's previous reputation in the Pentagon, the State Department or in the White House itself, his opinions should no longer be accepted at face value. "If the President asked 10 questions before, now he asks 62," said a man close to him. When the time came for a decision on Laos or some other crucial area, the advice of the military and of the State Department was examined with a cold eye. A shift in policy, subtle but significant, began. President Kennedy surrounded himself with those who asked the tough questions: the Bob Kennedys, the Maxwell Taylors, the Ted Sorensens, the Robert McNamaras, the Paul Nitzes.

In the long run, the lessons of the Bay of Pigs probably saved the Administration from making potentially more serious mistakes later, and might even have saved American lives. In that sense, Joseph P. Kennedy, the patriarch of the Kennedy clan, was correct when he told his son, the President, after the invasion, that Cuba was the best lesson he could have had. But for the Cubans in exile, and for 1,199 members of Brigade 2506 languishing in prison, it was, at the very least, an end to their dreams.



"History recounts that on a certain occasion the Spanish people exchanged Napoleon's soldiers against pigs. We, on this occasion, are going to be a little more delicate: we will exchange with imperialism the soldiers against tractors."

Fidel Castro was speaking before the National Association of Small Farmers on the night of Wednesday, May 17, 1961. He was quite specific: "If imperialism does not want its worms to work, let it exchange them against tractors and agricultural machinery! Of course, those among such blackguards that may have committed murder, we cannot exchange against anything. Those that have assassinated are not subject to exchange. All others, all others, we will exchange with imperialism, against 500 bulldozers, if it is interested in rescuing them."

Four days before this proposal, Brigade 2506 had been transferred in the middle of the night from the Sports Palace to the Naval Hospital, a five-story building, still uncompleted, on the other side of Havana.

On May 19 a committee of 10 prisoners was elected by the Brigade and sent by Castro to the United States to negotiate. At the same time the "Tractors for Freedom Committee" was formed at the personal request of President Kennedy. The committee was immediately and widely denounced in Congress and the press as a form of appeasement.

The Brigade delegation explained to the Tractors for Freedom Committee that Castro wanted 500 bulldozer tractors and that he considered this not an exchange or trade, but rather a reparation to Cuba by the United States for the damages sustained in the invasion. The American State Department in its turn insisted that the sending of tractors to Cuba must be considered an exchange and not an indemnification. The prisoners returned to Havana, and the Tractors for Freedom Committee began to raise money, though attacks continued by American elements that disapproved of any negotiation with Castro. President Kennedy endorsed the committee, but tried to keep up the impression that its operations were private, not government sponsored.

To placate its critics the committee cabled Castro on June 2

offering 500 small wheel-type tractors instead of the larger caterpillar bulldozers he wanted. Castro's angry answer stuck to his original position: he wanted 500 bulldozers as payment for damages. The committee sent a delegation to Havana, where Castro said he would take 500 bulldozers or \$28 million in cash. He was willing to accept smaller equipment if its value equaled that of 500 bulldozers.

A deadline of June 23 was reached without agreement, and the Tractors for Freedom Committee decided to disband. Castro sent the Brigade's delegation of 10 prisoners back to the States. The prisoners found that the Americans who had promised to help them were no longer available.

In despair they turned to their own people—the families of the men in the Brigade. A "Cuban Families Committee for the Liberation of the Prisoners of War" was formed.

President Kennedy placed the blame for the failure of negotiations squarely on Castro. At a press conference the President said, "The committee did everything conceivable for the purpose of showing its good faith, but Mr. Castro has not accepted."

The record is not so clear-cut. The prisoners suffered more from domestic American politics than they did at the hands of Castro. In the controversy surrounding the exchange, one thing was consistently overlooked: Castro was apparently sincere in wanting to bargain. However, at the time everyone, even those on the committee, seemed to fall victim to the naive American belief that the "bad guy" never can be trusted. Castro already had proved, at the Bay of Pigs, that the "bad guys" don't always lose. And as events later would bear out, he *could* be dealt with over the bargaining table, if the right techniques were used.

Had the political climate in the United States been less inflammatory, it is not at all unlikely that Brigade 2506 could have been released in June of 1961 for \$28 million in tractors, cash and credits. Instead of freedom through tractors, however, the men were doomed to the degradation of a year and a half longer in prison. And in the end the price on their heads more than doubled.

In July the prisoners were transferred from the Naval Hospital to the Principe Castle, on the outskirts of Havana. At the same time, in Miami, Alvaro Sanchez was organizing the campaign of the Cuban Families Committee. It was uphill work, with little support from the American government or people. It was not until December 6 that the committee was granted tax-exempt status by the Internal Revenue Service, officially establishing it as a non-profit organization and making all contributions to the committee tax deductible. This was the first governmental boost for the campaign to ransom the captives.

A cryptic item from the *Prensa Latina* News Agency in Havana on March 20, 1962, foreshadowed the next development. Time had run out for an exchange of the prisoners for tractors, the item said. Two days later a Cuban government radio broadcast the news to the world: the mercenaries would be tried as war criminals.

In New York Alvaro Sanchez reacted by sending a cablegram to Castro, offering himself as a hostage in order to keep the negotiations open. Four days later Castro replied by cable: THE LACK OF INTEREST ON THE PART OF THOSE MAINLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE ACT OF AGGRESSION ON OUR COUNTRY IN THE GENEROUS OFFER OF THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT, EVADING INDEFINITELY ITS ACCEPTANCE, JUSTIFIED IN ITSELF THIS DECISION [to "bring to trial the invaders of Playa Giron"].

On Thursday morning, March 29, 1962, the men left their cells and walked to the courtyard in the center of the prison as if they were going to a party. There were jokes and laughter and shouts of *vivas* to comrades from other galleries whom they had not seen in months. When they were seated in the bright sunshine on the rows of narrow benches, Artime, Pepe and Oliva were brought into the yard and taken to the first bench. Without any command the men stood at attention and sang the national hymn; then they cheered and began gathering around the leaders. A Negro named Carrillo embraced Artime, and a commissar named Martinez shouted for Artime to stop acting like a politician with the Negro. But Carrillo said, "You are wrong; this is my brother."

The noise rose and in the confusion a militia guard struck another Negro. Torres Mena, of the tank company, instantly leaped forward and hit the militiaman in the face with his fist. When Martinez tried to halt the fight, a prisoner hit him. The Brigade was almost out of control. Sporadic fights began, two prisoners were bayoneted, some were hit with rifle butts. A bloody riot seemed inevitable.

Capt. Pedro Luis Rodriguez rushed to Pepe and Oliva and begged them to control the men. Pepe bellowed out a command and the entire Brigade, even those who had been wounded, as well as the Castro guards, snapped to attention. There was complete silence. As one prisoner recalled, "It was so quiet you could hear a fly going around."

From the bench where the five-man tribunal sat in the shade facing the prisoners, Augusto Martinez Sanchez, the president of the tribunal, called out: "Jose Perez San Roman. Do you have something to declare?"

Pepe came to attention, walked briskly from his bench to a position directly in front of Martinez Sanchez, halted with exaggerated clicking of heels and said loudly, "*Me abstengo.*" (I refuse to answer.)

Next, Sanchez called on Artime—and Artime repeated Pepe's action. Oliva's turn came—and he followed suit. Martinez Sanchez then asked if anyone in the Brigade wished to make a statement. The silence was impressive.

Instead of the mass declarations accusing the United States that the communists had hoped for, the trial was taking an unplanned and unwanted turn. It was not the propaganda show they expected. Around the top of the prison, cables and television cameras had been stationed, ready to show Cuba and the world how the worms reacted. But from the first moment when the fighting developed, the trial was not shown on television or broadcast on radio, and no Western newsmen were ever permitted inside the fortress.

The court heard witnesses against the Brigade on Thursday and Friday, then recessed for the weekend.

Meanwhile, Roberto San Roman and two other Brigade members who had escaped after the defeat, Nildo Acevedo and Manuel Rebozo, flew to Washington on Thursday night. They went to see a State Department official to ask for some kind of government support for the prisoners. The official could not make any specific promises, and the Cubans left, dissatisfied.

By nature, Cubans are emotional and often inclined to act impulsively, but seldom had Cubans acted more impetuously than did the three men from the Brigade. In anger and without much thought, they left the State Department, hailed a taxicab and went directly across town to the Justice Department and demanded to see Robert Kennedy. Within five minutes Roberto was inside the Attorney General's fifth-floor office, while the other Cubans waited outside.

"This man was completely different," Roberto said. "This was like talking to a Brigade man. He was very worried about the Brigade and he wanted to know everything that I knew—if there was any possibility that they would be shot, and how the people of Miami felt about it. We talked about the families and everything. I told him that for sure some of them would get shot, maybe not all of them, but some of them, probably at least the staff, and that Miami was boiling, waiting for some kind of action from the United States."

The Attorney General listened intently, asked several questions and then said, "All right, Roberto, we are going to do everything we can. I give you my word we will do everything possible to keep them from being shot." He asked Roberto to keep in contact with him and to "call me 10 times a day if you have to." He wanted to know details of the trial as it developed. From that time Roberto and the others worked directly through Robert Kennedy, whom they regarded as caring about their cause—a sentiment they did not feel existed inside the State Department.

For the remainder of the trial, Roberto San Roman called Robert Kennedy constantly day and night—at his office, at the White House and at his home in McLean, Virginia. As good as his word, the Attorney General was always available.



The trial was resumed on Monday. Witnesses continued to heap abuse on the prisoners, and the prisoners continued to refuse to cooperate with their captors. On Tuesday, after a short, apologetic speech by the government-appointed defense counsel, the trial adjourned, and the men went back to prison to await their sentence.

On Sunday, April 8, Castro announced his verdict and a new ransom demand to the world. None of the men would be shot; all would be sentenced to 30 years in jail. But their freedom could be purchased. Castro set a scale of four "prices." Artime, Pepe and Oliva could be ransomed for \$500,000 apiece. In a second group each man's freedom could be bought for

\$100,000; in a third, \$50,000; and in a fourth, \$25,000. The total ransom price was \$62 million.

To show his good faith, Castro told the Cuban Families Committee he would hand over to them the most seriously wounded prisoners "on credit" and let them go back to the United States.

The 60 wounded men, including Enrique (Harry) Ruiz-Williams, who had been second-in-command of the Heavy Gun Battalion and who now acted as a spokesman for the prisoners, were flown to Miami on Saturday, April 14.

After a meeting with Robert Kennedy, Harry and Alvaro Sanchez began a new campaign to raise the ransom money. Initial publicity was good, but as time passed Harry realized that overcoming apathy and outright opposition would be slow work.

In May, 214 of the remaining Brigade prisoners were transferred once again, this time to Castro's political prison on the Isle of Pines. Here conditions were the worst they had to endure since the first days after their capture.

In June, 1962, at Robert Kennedy's suggestion, Harry Williams and Alvaro Sanchez asked James B. Donovan to represent them in negotiating with Castro. Donovan agreed.

Donovan had served in the OSS during World War II, participated in the prosecution of Nazi war criminals and acted as court-appointed defense lawyer for Soviet spy Rudolph Abel. In 1962 he was chosen by the U.S. government to negotiate the exchange in West Berlin of Abel and U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers.

After much negotiating and communicating from a distance, Donovan went to see Castro at the end of August. Donovan had been instructed by the administration that for practical and political reasons the \$62 million ransom could not be paid to Castro in cash. Donovan had to get Castro, who wanted Yankee dollars, to agree to accept the ransom in some other form. After two long conferences, Castro said that he would accept medicine and foodstuffs of a value equal to the cash originally demanded.

By October it became apparent that it would be physically impossible to send the ransom in the form of foodstuffs. Castro and Donovan agreed that payment could be made in medicines and baby foods. On October 19, Donovan, in New York, received a list of the medicines the Cubans wanted.

On October 22 the Cuban missile crisis broke.

Perhaps the most astonishing aspect of the Cuban crisis is that the negotiations for the Bay of Pigs prisoners remained open all those searing hours. Phone calls and cables continued between New York and Havana.

When the crisis was over, Alvaro Sanchez was allowed to visit the Isle of Pines. He was shocked by the physical condition of the men. Starvation rations and ill treatment had given them an aspect resembling that of the victims of Auschwitz. But later when reporters asked whether the prisoners would be liberated, Sanchez replied, "Yes. Yes."

With the missile crisis over, the American government with Robert Kennedy in the Van threw its power and prestige behind the effort to raise the ransom money. Pharmaceutical companies were contacted and agreed to supply drugs at wholesale prices. Things moved quickly during November and December.

Then, on December 16, the first shipment of drugs was transported to Florida to be loaded on planes and a ship. On the afternoon of Friday, December 21, Donovan and Castro signed a Memorandum of Agreement on the ransoming of the prisoners.

On Sunday, December 23, the imprisoned survivors of the Brigade were flown to San Antonio de los Baños airfield in Havana Province. At 5 p.m., as the ship bearing medicines was being unloaded, the prisoners began boarding the first plane. In about a half hour it took off, with 108 men.

By 8:55 p.m. the fourth flight of the night had landed at Homestead Airport in Miami, bringing the number of prisoners to 426.

That evening Castro announced that no more prisoners would leave until he was paid \$2,925,000 in cash that the Cuban Families Committee had promised him in April when the wounded prisoners came out.

Donovan's assistant, John E. Nolan, telephoned Robert Kennedy. With one phone call to Cardinal Cushing in Boston, Kennedy raised a million dollars. The cardinal, one of the sponsors of the Cuban Families Committee, long before had promised Alvaro Sanchez that when the time came he would

do as much as anyone for the prisoners. Bob Kennedy then called Gen. Lucius Clay, also a sponsor. Clay, Robert Knight and Robert B. Anderson set to work raising money immediately. By 3 on the afternoon of December 24, a note for \$2.9 million was deposited in the Royal Bank of Canada, which had been holding funds used in the exchange. Castro, Donovan and Nolan met in Castro's office, where Donovan signed a written authorization releasing the money to Castro. At the airport the last three planes received the signal to leave, and the leaders of the Brigade were put on board.

After the last prisoner had boarded the last plane, Donovan returned to say farewell to Castro and to sign a required receipt for the prisoners. Fidel was puffing on a long cigar, surrounded by militia. Said Donovan in a loud voice: "You know, Premier, I have been thinking of all the good I have been doing for the people of Cuba these past weeks. I have relieved you of almost 1,200 liabilities and also I have been helping the children, the sick, the poor and the elderly among the Cuban people. I think that when the next election is held I'm coming back and run against you. I think I can win." Castro, with a long look and a long puff on his cigar, replied: "You know, doctor, I think you may be right. So there will be no elections." The two men shook hands, and Donovan boarded the plane.



There had never been a ceremony quite like it. A deafening roar went up from the thousands in the stadium when the white convertible carrying the President and his wife entered the Orange Bowl. A thousand flags, many of them homemade, waved in the warm Miami sunshine that Saturday, December 29. The President walked toward the platform set up on the 50-yard line and shook hands with Pepe, Oliva and Artime. They stood at attention together while the band played the national anthems of the United States and Cuba. Then he strode across the grass to the Brigade and moved through the lines of men in khaki uniforms, greeting them and shaking hands.

The formal ceremonies opened and Pepe San Roman spoke for the Brigade. "We know how precious liberty is and we know that Cuba has no liberty. The 2506 Brigade, we offer ourselves to God and to the free world as warriors in the battle against communism."

Pepe turned toward the President. "Mr. President, the men of the 2506 Brigade give you their banner—we temporarily deposit it with you for your safekeeping."

One of the wounded soldiers, Rolando Novoa, was standing on crutches, near the platform, holding the folded gold-and-blue banner against his chest. He quietly handed the flag to Oliva and Oliva gave it to the President. "It was the great moment of my life," Oliva said later. The President unfurled the flag and stepped to the microphone with obvious emotion. He asked the Brigade to be seated on the grass, turned toward Pepe and Jose Miro Cardona and said:

"Commander, Doctor, I want to express my great appreciation to the Brigade for making the United States the custodian of this flag." He paused, and then his voice rose emotionally. "I can assure you that this flag will be returned to this Brigade in a free Havana."

The Brigade rose and cheered wildly. Shouts of "Guerra! Guerra!" and "Libertad! Libertad!" came from 40,000 throats. Some men wept.

"I wonder if Senor Facundo Miranda, who preserved this flag through the last 20 months, would come forward so we can meet him," the President continued. After Miranda approached and shook hands, the President said, "I wanted to know who I should give it back to."

Again the stadium rocked with applause.

Keeping his remarks extemporaneous, the President went on: "I always had the impression (I hope the members of the Brigade will sit down again)—I always had the impression that the Brigade was made up mostly of young men, but standing over there is a Cuban patriot 57, one 59, one 61, I wonder if those three could stand up so that the people of the United States could realize that they represent the spirit of the Cuban revolution in its best sense."

Next came the formal address. On behalf of the government and the people, President Kennedy welcomed the Brigade and brought "my nation's respect for your courage and your cause. Your small Brigade is a tangible reaffirmation that the human desire for freedom and independence is essentially unconquer-

able. Your conduct and valor are proof that, although Castro and his fellow dictators may rule nations, they do not rule people; that they may imprison bodies, but they do not imprison spirits; that they may destroy the exercise of liberty, but they cannot eliminate the determination to be free." He urged the Cubans in exile to submerge their differences in a united front. "Keep alive the spirit of the Brigade so that some day the people of Cuba will have a free chance to make a free choice—" for "The Brigade is the point of the spear, the arrow's head."

"Gentlemen of the Brigade," he said in closing, "I need not tell you how happy I am to welcome you here to the United States, and what a profound impression your conduct during some of the most difficult days and months that any free people have experienced—what a profound impression your conduct made upon not only the people of this country, but all the people of this hemisphere. Even in prison you served in the strongest possible way the cause of freedom, as you do today.

"I can assure you that it is the strongest wish of the people of this country, as well as the people of this hemisphere, that Cuba shall one day be free again, and when it is, this Brigade will deserve to march at the head of the free column."

Cheers almost drowned out the President's last words.

Jacqueline Kennedy stepped to the microphone and, in Spanish, said:

"It is an honor for me to be today with a group of the bravest men in the world, and to share in the joy that is felt by their families who, for so long, lived hoping, praying and waiting. I feel proud that my son has met the officers. He is still too young to realize what has happened here, but I will make it my business to tell him the story of your courage as he grows up. It is my wish and my hope that some day he may be a man at least half as brave as the members of Brigade 2506. Good luck."

There has been no happy ending. The Cuban problem remains. The first attempt to solve it—the invasion at the Bay of Pigs—has taken its place beside monumental failures of the past, and a new solution has not been found. Already some of what President Kennedy called the "sober and useful lessons" of the failure at the Bay of Pigs are becoming clear.

As recent events in Vietnam have shown, the Central Intelligence Agency still stands at the center of controversy. The CIA poses one of the serious dilemmas of the Cold War. It helps to maintain America's existence and yet some of its actions contribute to a lessening of faith in the government. Never again after the U-2 flight or after the Bay of Pigs can citizens take official statements at face value. This adds to the prevailing climate of cynicism. It corrupts and poisons the fabric of a democracy.

For all of the men of the Brigade, and especially the leaders, the death of President Kennedy came with shattering impact. To the leaders, as well as to many Cubans in exile, John Kennedy already is being regarded as a martyr to the cause of Cuban liberty. And, indeed, Cuba was a thread that wound through the President's two years, 10 months and two days in the White House: from the Bay of Pigs to the missile crisis; from the pledge in the Orange Bowl to his next trip to Miami 11 months later, and still another statement on Cuba ("a small group of conspirators has robbed the Cuban people of their independence") and then, after recalling the lines *Westward look, the land is bright*, the final journey to Texas and the final act in Dallas on November 22 at the hands of a self-professed pro-Castro assassin.

Yet the dream still lives.

Twelve months ago, when the Brigade prisoners were getting off their trucks at the airport before the flight back to the United States, one of Castro's militia guards winked broadly at them. When he heard of that incident, Max Lerner remembered the classic passage in Trotsky's *History of the Russian Revolution* in which a czarist soldier—instead of shooting at the mass of demonstrators—winked at them. That wink, Trotsky said, marked a turning point in the overthrow of the regime.

It is seven years since another small band of freedom fighters was crushed and the light went out in Hungary. Today, in their moments of despair and bitterness, the Cuban exiles often refer to Hungary. They do not know what their future holds, but they are determined they are not going to live a lifetime in exile, in the manner of the White Russians and the Hungarians. Each is waiting to return to Cuba.

—Haynes Johnson, Manuel Artime, Jose Perez San Roman, Erneido Oliva, Enrique Ruiz-Williams