

Reprinted from
THE
COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY
FORUM

THE PRESS AND THE BAY OF PIGS

VICTOR BERNSTEIN and JESSE GORDON

Aside from its other meanings, the Bay of Pigs was "also important in the history of relations between the American press and the U. S. Government," Clifton Daniel, managing editor of *The New York Times*, told the World Press Institute last year. Mr. Daniel went on to reconstruct this history insofar as it involved his newspaper. This article attempts a reconstruction on a somewhat broader basis. Such a history has permanent relevance to the democratic process; and, in any case, it is always useful to remind the press that if it worried as much about its own credibility gap as about the Administration's the country would be well served.

Early in November, 1960, Carey McWilliams, editor of *The Nation*, received a phone call from Paul Baran, Stanford University economist. He said that Ronald Hilton, then director of Stanford's Institute of Hispanic American and Luso-Brazilian Studies, "is just back from Guatemala. In the current issue of his *Hispanic American Report*, he writes that it is common knowledge down there that the CIA is training Cuban exiles at a secret Guatemalan base in preparation for an invasion of Cuba." Mr. McWilliams checked back with Dr. Hilton, and the result was an editorial which appeared in *The Nation* of Saturday, November 19.

"Fidel Castro," the editorial began, "may have a sounder basis for his expressed fears of a U. S.-financed 'Guatemala-type' invasion than most of us realize." It went on to give the gist of Dr. Hilton's story, which located the base near the

Mr. Bernstein graduated from Columbia College in 1921 and from the Columbia School of Journalism in 1925. He was managing editor of The Nation from 1952 to 1963 and is the author of Final Judgement: The Story of Nuremberg. Mr. Gordon, who was educated at Columbia and NYU, is an editorial consultant to The Nation and has been a news correspondent in Cuba.

mountain town of Retalhuleu and said that the whole affair had been aired on the front page of *La Hora*, Guatemala's leading newspaper. The editorial ended:

We ourselves, of course, pretend to no first-hand knowledge of the facts. . . . If Washington is ignorant of the existence of the base, or, knowing that it exists, is nevertheless innocent of any involvement in it, then surely the appropriate authorities will want to scotch all invidious rumors. . . . On the other hand, if the reports as heard by Dr. Hilton are true, then public pressure should be brought to bear upon the Administration to abandon this dangerous and hare-brained project.

There is a second reason why we believe the reports merit publication; they can, and should, be checked immediately by all U.S. news media with correspondents in Guatemala.

The issue containing the editorial went to press on Friday, November 11. On that day, 75 proofs, together with copies of a news release based upon the editorial, were distributed by Jesse Gordon to all major news media, including foreign news bureaus in New York. The more important local offices were serviced by messenger. Mr. Gordon followed the dispatch of the releases with telephone calls to various news desks.

The phone calls elicited some puzzling reactions. The Associated Press was called three times; each time a different desk man answered, professed interest in the story, but said he hadn't seen either the release or a proof of the editorial. Could duplicates be sent immediately? Three duplicates were sent in as many hours, apparently to end up on the desk of someone in the AP hierarchy who didn't want them to go any farther. In the end, neither the AP nor the United Press International used the story, nor did they request any check on it that weekend from their correspondents in Guatemala.

On Monday, Mr. Gordon was again in touch

with the UPI, this time speaking to Francis L. McCarthy, head of the service's Latin American desk. "Yes," said Mr. McCarthy, "there's a big base in operation in Guatemala and U. S. planes are flying in and out. But the Pentagon denies any knowledge and the State Department says 'no comment.' One story we hear is that the base is being built by the U.S. as a replacement for Guantánamo."

At this stage, knowledge of the base follows an interesting geographic distribution pattern. The readers of the Guatemalan newspaper *La Hora* knew there was a base. Indeed, according to Andrew Tully in his *CIA: The Inside Story*, "Practically everybody in Central America knew about this [Retalhuleu] training base and, of course, so did Fidel Castro." In the United States, however, where by repute exists the freest and most efficient press in the world, apparently the only people who knew about the base were Dr. Hilton, Mr. McCarthy, and the assorted readership (totaling fewer than 100,000) of the *Hispanic American Report*, *The Nation* and the *York* (Pa.) *Gazette and Daily* which—alone among the country's dailies—had published *The Nation's* release in its issue of November 12.

What of *The New York Times*, the *ultima Thule* of the publicist? Mr. Gordon sent four copies of the editorial to the *Times*—one each to the city and national editors, another to Herbert L. Matthews (editorial writer) and another to Peter Kihss (a staff reporter who was then covering domestic aspects of the Cuban situation). Additionally, the city and national desks of the *Times*, as well as those of other major news media, received copies over the PR Newswire, a private Teletype circuit. Mr. Gordon followed dispatch of the proofs by phone calls to Mr. Kihss and others; all professed interest in the story, and Mr. Gordon was asked where Dr. Hilton could be reached.

It took nine days for the *Times* to react. On page 32 of its issue of November 20, it printed an unsigned dispatch from Guatemala City based on its correspondent's interview with President Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes. The President was asked about "repeated reports" of a "base established with U. S. assistance as a training ground for military action against Cuba." The article continued:

The President branded the reports as a "lot of lies." He said the base . . . was one of several on which Guatemalan Army personnel was being

trained in guerilla warfare. The object of the training, he said, was to combat invasions of the type that have occurred recently in Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama.

Five days later, on November 25, the *York Gazette and Daily* shed light on how the AP had been handling developments:

The *Gazette and Daily* asked the AP . . . to check [*The Nation's*] report. The AP said *The Nation* article seemed "thin"—an adjective which, we think, fairly describes any story as it begins to develop from hearsay or second-hand sources But when we explained that we were not requesting a rewrite of *The Nation* article but rather a check in Guatemala, the AP went to work. Within a few days, the AP sent a story which was printed on page two of the *Gazette and Daily* on November 17, headlined: "Guatemala President Denies Reports of Anti-Castro Force." The headline reasonably sums up the story; the AP had interviewed President Ydígoras of Guatemala and he had "branded as false" the things *The Nation* had published.

Now for the windup. In a letter from Stanford dated November 19, Dr. Ronald Hilton writes as follows: "On Friday, November 18, Mr. [Lyman B.] Kirkpatrick [Jr.], the Inspector General of the CIA, spoke in San Francisco at the Commonwealth Club. . . . He was asked, 'Professor Hilton of Stanford says there is a CIA-financed base in Guatemala where plans are being made for an attack on Cuba. Professor Hilton says it will be a black day for Latin America and the U.S. if this takes place. Is this true?' After a long silence, Mr. Kirkpatrick replied: 'It will be a black day if we are found out.'"

In lying to both the *Times* man and the AP reporter, President Ydígoras displayed the virtue of consistency, at least. But there is another, more significant, observation to be made about these two dispatches. Neither reporter took the elementary journalistic step (or, if they took it, failed to report that they did so) of interviewing anyone on the staff of *La Hora*, which had published the story the previous October 30. At the very least, they should have seen—or reported an attempt to see—the newspaper's publisher, Clemente Marroquin Rojas, who was then a member of the Ydígoras cabinet (and is today Vice President of Guatemala). Moreover, according to Dr. Hilton, the base and its purposes were "common knowledge" in the country; should not the reporters have been instructed, at the very minimum, to test this "common knowledge"? It is precisely for this purpose, as any journalist will tell you, that taxi drivers have been invented. But both correspondents chose to go to the one man in the country who would be

sure to deny the story—the President.

There was, perhaps, some excuse for the AP correspondent, Albarao Contreras, who was a Guatemalan citizen and could hardly be expected to probe into government secrets for the meager space rates paid to him as a “stringer.” But what of the *Times* man?

During April of the current year, while this article was being researched, Victor Bernstein wrote to Mr. Daniel at the *Times*, requesting identification of the author of the November 20, 1960, dispatch, and in general asking for clarification of what the *Times* had done after receiving *The Nation's* original press release. Mr. Daniel replied promptly in a letter dated April 27, 1967:

Emanuel Freedman, then our Foreign News Editor, wrote a memorandum on November 25, 1960, that referred to the denial interview with President Ydigoras published in *The Times* of November 20, and then provided this background: “We first investigated Dr. Hilton’s allegations a few days earlier on the basis of a tear sheet sent to us in advance of *The Nation's* appearance on the newsstands. We talked with Dr. Hilton at Stanford University by telephone to determine whether he had anything more than the hearsay evidence attributed to him in *The Nation*. (He had not.) Then we asked the Washington Bureau, which drew a blank, and our stringer in Guatemala, who reported that there had been rumors about a U.S.-organized training base, but that it had been impossible to get any confirmation. He denied that Ydigoras had gone on TV about the matter.”

The Ydigoras interview was written by Paul Kennedy. He was in Nicaragua at the time that *The Nation* article reached us, and we asked him to go to Guatemala to look into the situation.... He met a blank wall in his inquiries and on the 19th sent the Ydigoras interview. Mr. Kennedy left Guatemala on the 21st.

Paul Kennedy was a *Times* expert on Latin America. If, for the nonce, his interview with Ydigoras satisfied the *Times'* editors, it did not satisfy the editors of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, who a short time afterward sent one of their own men, Richard Dudman, into Guatemala. Mr. Dudman saw no purpose in collecting further denials, so he steered clear of the Presidential Palace and ran around asking questions. He confirmed the existence of a “secret, 1,200-foot airstrip” that had been cut out of the Guatemalan jungle, and of nearby barracks capable of housing 500 men. A Guatemalan civilian told him that many of the soldiers at the base spoke with a “Cuban accent”; he also conscientiously reported that an English-speaking Guatemalan

soldier had dismissed all stories about the base as “Communist propaganda.”

Even with these tentative conclusions, Mr. Dudman had censorship troubles and in the end filed his story not out of Guatemala, but out of neighboring El Salvador. This led the *Post-Dispatch* to print an editorial which should have galvanized the entire American press into action:

What is going on in Guatemala? Who is trying to conceal what, and for what purpose? Why should Richard Dudman . . . have to go to neighboring El Salvador to send a dispatch to this newspaper about what he found in Guatemala?

These were what any journalist would call “gutsy” questions, crying for answers. Yet the AP and the UPI, upon whom the overwhelming bulk of the American press is utterly dependent for foreign news, still made no attempt to search out the answers. But around the middle of December the *Los Angeles Mirror* sent its aviation editor, Don Dwiggin, to Guatemala. He reported that American funds were involved in the airstrip and base construction. The AP picked up and distributed a three-paragraph summary of Mr. Dwiggin’s long article, but again failed to show any reportorial initiative of its own. In an article that appeared in *The Nation* dated January 7, 1961, Mr. Dwiggin presented strong evidence in support of Dr. Hilton’s “hearsay” reports:

No one in an official position would explain why Guatemala, a country without a single jet plane of its own, needs a jet airstrip for military use. . . . A military base actually exists behind the green curtain of Retalhuleu. All access to the airfield is cut off. . . . As there is no airline traffic into Retalhuleu, there is no question as to the airstrip’s purpose. Guatemala’s air force, it should be noted here, consists of corroding war-surplus Mustang fighters, AT-6 trainers and some war-weary, twin-engine bombers squatting like wounded birds at Guatemala City’s La Aurora Airport.

And Mr. Dwiggin reported that, upon his return to Los Angeles, an anti-Castro pilot told him of a “fantastic air-raid operation scheduled for some time early in 1961.” People “high up the government,” the pilot said, were offering \$25,000 to pilots to fly the mission.

It would seem that, by now, things were beginning to add up, even if somewhat slowly. There is definitely a new airstrip and base of some kind in Guatemala; even the *Times* says so. Mr. Dudman has reported the possible presence at the base of soldiers who speak Spanish with a Cuban accent. Mr. Dwiggin has recorded that U.S. money is involved in construction of

the base and has pointed out that Guatemala, which has no jets, obviously has no use for an airstrip capable of handling them. Unmentioned, so far, is the unmentionable CIA. Still, it would indeed seem that Castro had reasonable grounds for suspecting that the U.S. was planning something unpleasant for him.

But to the *Times*, nothing adds up to anything, yet. On January 3, the U.S. broke relations with Castro. "What snapped U.S. patience," said the *Times* "Review of the Week" for Sunday, January 8, "was a new propaganda offensive from Havana charging that the U.S. was plotting an 'imminent invasion' of Cuba, and a demand that the U.S. cut its Havana embassy to eleven." In nearly five columns of text on the Cuban situation, the only base mentioned by the *Times* is Guantánamo. Why, then, the writer asks plaintively, was Castro making all those invasion charges and fulminating so against the U.S.? The writer answers his own question: "The Castro Government has become increasingly shrill with its anti-American propaganda to busy minds that otherwise would be preoccupied with dissatisfactions at home."

But two days later *Times* readers were to get more solid fare. In the January 10 issue there appeared a second and lengthy dispatch from Paul Kennedy, this one sent directly from Retalhuleu. (In the weeks following November 20, 1960, Clifton Daniel explained in his letter of April 27, 1967, "rumors and tangible pieces of information built up—including stories published in the *Los Angeles Mirror* and the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*—and as a result we asked Mr. Kennedy to go back to Guatemala and get out of the capital to try to find out just what was going on.") In a sense, it can be said that this second Kennedy piece broke the log-jam on the story, and at a later date it was to be pinpointed by President Kennedy as an example of "premature disclosures of security information."

Actually, the *Times* article of January 10 was written with the utmost circumspection. "This area [around Retalhuleu] is the focal point," the story began, "of Guatemala's military preparations for what Guatemalans consider will be an almost inevitable clash with Cuba." This was not only circumspect; it was misleading. The base had nothing to do with the military preparations of Guatemala; it had to do with the military preparations of the U.S. and a group of Cuban exiles. That Mr. Kennedy knew this, or at least strongly suspected it, was apparent in his

text; but each time he offered a sinister interpretation of events, he balanced it with an innocent one. Thus, while Guatemalan authorities insist that the purpose of the base was to "meet an assault, expected almost any day, from Cuba," the "opponents of the Ydígoras Administration" insist that the preparations are for an offensive against Castro. (What is the relevance of labeling those who suspect aggression as "opponents" of Ydígoras? Are we to believe them less?) Mr. Kennedy asserted flatly that at the base "commando-like forces are being drilled in guerrilla warfare tactics by foreign personnel, mostly from the United States," and that Americans are assisting with "matériel and ground and air facilities." But he carefully added, quoting an American official, that the United States is supplying only matériel needed for "defensive operations."

Nothing in the story identifies the nationality of the guerrillas under training; Cubans are mentioned only as being among the "experts from several nations" who are acting as trainers. The base, Mr. Kennedy observes (laughingly?), seems to be on the wrong side of Guatemala for efficient defense against a Cuban assault on the Caribbean coast; on the other hand, it is explained to him that its inland site gives it good capabilities for self-defense.

Mr. Dwiggin, it is now clear, came much closer to the truth than Mr. Kennedy. But a half-revelation in the *Times* carries more impact than full revelation elsewhere. With this dispatch, the country as a whole became aware that something peculiar was going on in Guatemala, to say the least. Those who had read Dr. Hilton's original "hearsay" reports found Mr. Kennedy somewhat less baffling; they had a key to the puzzle. But only readers of *Hispanic American Report*, *The Nation*, and the *York Gazette and Daily* were in that fortunate position. Still missing, however, was any echo of Dr. Hilton's suggestion of CIA involvement. It was now to come from an unexpected source — the State Department. A few hours after the Kennedy story appeared in the *Times*, the afternoon *New York Post* described State officials as turning aside all questions about Retalhuleu with the observation, "Don't ask us about it, ask the spooks — the Central Intelligence Agency."

Meanwhile, beginning on January 8, the *New York Daily News* began a series of articles that pushed back the frontiers of our knowledge a

little farther. The activities in Guatemala were definitely in preparation for an invasion of Cuba, the paper said; it quoted Manuel A. de Varona, head of "the most powerful anti-Castro" group in the United States, as saying: "Our invading force will land in Cuba. . . . They will take over as occupation troops. . . . A provisional government will be set up [which] will restore all properties to the rightful owners." Mr. de Varona was vague only about where all the money was coming from. The *Daily News* was less vague, but quite inaccurate. "It is an open secret," said the newspaper, "that the *Frente* [various anti-Castro groups in the U.S. had been organized into a Front] is being financed by American and Cuban industrial interests" who hoped to get their properties back from Fidel Castro. It was, of course, not industrialists who were paying for all the shenanigans going on; it was the American taxpayer via the CIA.

On January 11, the *Miami Herald*, located in the city where most of the Cuban refugees were living and where the anti-Castro activities were greatest, printed the first of a long series of articles on what was going on. The first story said forthrightly: "Recruiters, some American, have for months been selecting anti-Castro men in Miami for secret flights to Retalhuleu." But two days later *Time* magazine blandly referred to what it called Castro's "continued tawdry little melodrama of invasion." And about the same time, in the Security Council of the U.N., U.S. Ambassador James J. Wadsworth termed the latest Cuban charge of planned invasion as "empty, groundless, false and fraudulent."

The story continued to expand. *Time* magazine finally decided that Castro was not altogether a victim of hallucinations, and on January 27 declared that the *Frente* was getting up to \$500,000 a month from the U.S. and boldly stated that the entire operation was in charge of a CIA agent known as "Mr. B." Dr. Hilton had had to wait ten weeks for the last of his "hearsay" reports to be confirmed by a major publication.

It is understandable that President Kennedy, Secretary of State Rusk, CIA Director Dulles and others in Washington were viewing this publicity with something less than enthusiasm. True, during the campaign the previous fall, Kennedy had complained that America had done too little for Castro's "democratic opposition" and said that if elected he would do more. But he had never spelled out just what he would do. Had he been thinking of presenting *bon voyage* baskets to any

anti-Castro invaders departing our shores? Four days before the invasion actually began, he told a press conference: "There will not be under any conditions an intervention in Cuba by the U.S. armed forces. . . . The basic issue in Cuba is not one between the United States and Cuba. It is between the Cubans themselves. And I intend to see that we adhere to this principle. . . ."

But the deep American involvement could not be kept hidden—not after the Guatemala story had once broken. And it grew increasingly difficult to hide as recruiting agents scurried around New York and Miami, gathering sacrificial lambs for the planned invasion. By the second week in April the recruiting was so open that *El Diario*, a New York Spanish-language paper, and the *New York Mirror*, could print the addresses of local recruiting stations. Then there was the impossible problem of keeping the various leaders of the Cuban exile groups quiet. Right and Left factions filled the press with their mutual recriminations, or with complaints of discriminatory treatment at the hands of the Administration.

Still, there persisted in Washington the quaint notion that nothing was really happening unless it was reported in *The New York Times*. And, for many weeks following Paul Kennedy's somewhat equivocal report from Retalhuleu, the *Times* did nothing deeply distressing to Allen W. Dulles. Indeed, in some ways it seemed to be playing the Administration game. As late as April 5, just 12 days before the invasion began, James Reston wrote that "The Administration has reason to believe that there are now between 100 and 200 Cuban airmen in Czechoslovakia being trained to fly Soviet MIG fighters." Washington officialdom, aware that it could not stop speculation on the invasion, had evidently decided on an alternative: to leak stories tending to justify it.

Then, on April 7, the *Times* printed a long dispatch from Miami by Tad Szulc, their able and experienced Latin-American correspondent. While there were few elements in this account that had not already appeared elsewhere, Mr. Szulc not only linked the CIA to the coming invasion but hinted strongly that the climax was "imminent." The handling given the story by the *Times*, and the crisis of conscience it provoked among its editors, were described at length by Mr. Daniel in his address last year before the World Press Institute. Orvil Dryfoos, then publisher of the *Times*, was described by

Mr. Daniel as particularly upset: "He was gravely troubled by the security implications of Szulc's story. He could envision failure for the invasion, and he could see *The New York Times* being blamed for a bloody fiasco."

So Mr. Dryfoos, according to the Daniel account, came down from his fourteenth floor office to the news room on the third floor to see Turner Catledge, then managing editor. The two conferred and decided to turn to Mr. Reston, in Washington, for advice. The author of *The Artillery of the Press* advised his superiors to spike the guns, more or less, and the upshot was that Mr. Szulc's account was edited to eliminate references to the CIA and to the "imminence" of the invasion. Instead of a four-column head, as had been originally planned, it was given a one-column head.

In justice to the *Times*, it must be noted that in addition to the consciences of Messrs. Dryfoos, Catledge, and Reston, there were other consciences at work that night. Lewis Jordan, news editor, and Theodore Bernstein, assistant managing editor, objected strenuously to this downgrading of the story as a violation of *Times* tradition; and Mr. Daniel, in his recounting of the episode, placed himself alongside the dissenters.

About a fortnight after the Bay of Pigs took its dismal place in history, a group of press executives met the President at the White House. Mr. Daniel told the World Press Institute what took place:

President Kennedy ran down a list of what he called premature disclosures of security information. His examples were drawn mainly from *The New York Times*. He mentioned, for example, Paul Kennedy's story. . . . Mr. Catledge pointed out that this information had been published in *La Hora* in Guatemala and in *The Nation* in this country before it was ever published in the *Times*.

"But it was not news until it appeared in the *Times*," the President replied.

While he scolded *The New York Times*, the President said in an aside to Mr. Catledge, "If you had printed more about the operation, you would have saved us from a colossal mistake." More than a year later, President Kennedy [told] Orvil Dryfoos, "I wish you had run everything on Cuba. . . . I am just sorry you didn't tell it at the time."

President Kennedy had changed his mind, but Mr. Reston never did. A year ago he told Mr. Daniel: "It is ridiculous to think that publishing the fact that the invasion was imminent would have avoided this disaster. I am quite sure the

operation would have gone forward." Certainly he did nothing to prevent it. Four days before the invasion, he was publicly asking questions to which he already obviously knew most of the answers:

How much will the U. S. Government help the Cuban refugees? Will it provide them with all the money and arms necessary to launch an invasion, not from American ports and airfields, but from somewhere else? Will it train the refugees in the arts of sabotage and guerrilla warfare in Guatemala or elsewhere?

Yet, in a larger sense, Mr. Reston was probably right. The President, in his astonishing asides to Messrs. Catledge and Dryfoos, seems merely to have been trying to share his monopoly of wrong decisions. In all likelihood, it would have done no good for the *Times* to have "told all" on April 7. At best, the telling might have forced the Administration to delay the invasion a couple of weeks (at added expense to the American taxpayers, who were footing the training bills); at worst, it might have enabled Castro to have been even better prepared than he was, and the invasion might have been totally crushed in one day instead of three.

The evidence is strong that by these final weeks, the affair was beyond aborting; planning had reached the point of no return. The time for arousing public opposition to the idiocy which was launched on April 17 was back in October, 1960, when *La Hora* first broke the story of the Retalhuleu base. The persistency with which the American press ignored the story still seems incredible. Its intrinsic plausibility should at once have been recognized and acted upon; every informed journalist in the U.S. knew Guatemala as an old playground of the CIA. This is where the "spooks" from Washington had overturned the Arbenz regime in 1954.

About the press coverage of the invasion itself, the less said the better. The chief source of information was a Mr. Lem Jones who, according to Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., in his *A Thousand Days*, "was putting out in the name of the [Cuban Revolutionary] Council press releases dictated over the phone by the CIA." The CIA, Mr. Schlesinger intimates wryly, had not even bothered to inform the Council that Mr. Jones had been hired to do the invasion publicity. Who was Mr. Jones? In Haynes Johnson's *The Bay of Pigs*, he is described this way: "The president of Lem Jones Associates, Inc., a Madison Avenue public relations firm . . . had done public rela-

tions work for such clients as a lay committee of the Armenian Apostolic Church and corporation stockholders waging proxy-fights; but his present client, he told a reporter, was 'a very serious thing, too.'

Mr. Jones was still in the proxy business, it appeared; this time he was proxying for the Cuban Revolutionary Council and the CIA. Largely on the basis of his news releases, headlines throughout the U.S. recounted mass uprisings by the Cuban people against Castro, Soviet MIGs blasting the invaders, rebel capture of the Isle of Pines, the surrender of Castro's brother. An eight-column banner in the *Miami News* screamed: CUBAN NAVY IN REVOLT. All this time the invading force of 1,400 men was being systematically destroyed by Castro's forces, and nowhere in the length and breadth of the island did a single Cuban raise a rifle in behalf of the "liberators." And four American pilots, members of the Alabama Air National Guard, assigned by the U.S. Air Force for special duty with the invasion, died in this affair which, in President Kennedy's words, was strictly one "between the Cubans themselves."

From beginning to end, the Bay of Pigs was as humiliating for the American press as it was for the country as a whole. In the aftermath, some editors recognized this. On May 10, *The New York Times* editorialized under the heading, "The Right Not To Be Lied To":

The Cuban tragedy has raised a domestic question that is likely to come up again and again until it is solved. The cause may be something that is happening in Laos [or Vietnam?], in Central Africa or in Latin America, but the question remains the same: is a democratic government in an open society such as ours ever justified in deceiving its own people? . . . A democracy—our democracy—cannot be lied to. . . . The basic principle involved is that of confidence.

Newsweek posed the question: "To what degree was the press really to blame for the magnitude of the American propaganda defeat? The best answer is that the newsmen, like many others, became pawns in the intensifying conflict between Washington and Havana."

The press had a right to be angry. It had been lied to, again and again, by President Kennedy, Allen W. Dulles, Dean Rusk, and everyone else in the hierarchy of blunderers responsible for the Bay of Pigs. But it also had the duty to be ashamed. No law required it to swallow uncritically everything that officialdom said. On the very day the American-planned, American-

equipped expedition was landing at the Bay of Pigs, Secretary Rusk told a group of newsmen: "The American people are entitled to know whether we are intervening in Cuba or intend to do so in the future. The answer to that question is no." Where was the editorial explosion that should have greeted this egregious lie? And even when the press had opportunity to strike a blow for truth, it failed. On April 19, while the shooting was still going on, the *Times* received a dispatch from its correspondent at the U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay. The last paragraph of the story read:

The sensitive radar on Navy ships here have picked up no trace of high-speed Cuban or Communist aircraft. Officials, therefore, are confident that there have been no MIG fighters in this area of Cuba, at least. Nor has the Navy sighted any foreign submarines.

This last paragraph appeared only in the early edition of April 20. In the later editions, it was deleted. Mr. Daniel, asked about this, made this response in his letter of April 27: "I cannot at this date give the reason with certainty, but this sort of thing happens so routinely in makeovers for late editions that the odds are that it was simply a matter of space for makeup purposes." In other words, all the news that fits.

There is no reason to doubt Mr. Daniel's explanation, but an explanation is not a justification. Lem Jones' war bulletins out of Madison Avenue had been replete with references to MIGs and Soviet submarines, the work of CIA fiction writers seeking to raise war fever in the American people. Surely so strong a doubt that they ever existed, expressed by so unimpeachable a source as our own Navy men, deserved a better play than a tail-end paragraph. And if it had been anywhere else in the story, it would not have had to be dropped for space.

How does one explain the malaise that afflicted so much of the press during the period? There is no doubt that, in many places, a covert if voluntary censorship was at work. The *Times* treatment of Szulc was one example. The *Miami Herald* openly acknowledged voluntary censorship. The *Herald* published its first story on the Miami-Retalhuleu airlift the day after Paul Kennedy's story from Guatemala appeared in *The New York Times*. A box alongside the *Herald's* story explained:

Publication of the accompanying story on the Miami-Guatemala airlift was withheld for more than two months by the *Herald*. Its release was decided upon only after U. S. aid to anti-Castro

fighters in Guatemala was first revealed elsewhere.

This was on January 11. The *Herald* had apparently known all about Retalhuleu since November 10—just about the time Dr. Hilton was reporting the story to *The Nation*. President Kennedy should have chastized the *Herald*, not *The Times*; had the *Herald* printed the story at the outset, there might really never have been a Bay of Pigs.

This demented patriotism, the urge to play along with government at whatever cost to truth, struck elsewhere. Mr. Schlesinger (in *A Thousand Days*) reports that in March 1961 the *New Republic* set aside a detailed exposé of invasion preparations in Miami at the request of the White House. (Of the magazine's acceptance of the suggestion that the piece be dropped, Mr. Schlesinger comments that it was "a patriotic act which left me slightly uncomfortable.") And in the February 2, 1963, issue of *Editor & Publisher*, Alan J. Gould, on the occasion of his retirement as general manager of the AP, is quoted as saying:

I think the people in Government should have learned a lesson for all time on the handling of the Cuban affair. Occasionally we have withheld stories for a time in the national interest. When the President of the United States calls you in and says this is a matter of vital security, you accept the injunction.

If the editors of the *Miami Herald* knew the significance of Retalhuleu, it is safe to say that the AP editors knew, too. Yet the AP never budged any part of its massive reportorial staff to get at the truth in behalf of its thousands of clients. Neither the AP, nor the UPI, nor the San Francisco papers ever seemed to have tried to follow through on the startling remark of that CIA official to a San Francisco Commonwealth Club gathering: "It will be a black day if we are ever found out."

The press is not normally so cooperative with government, even on matters touching on national security. In this instance, there was no security to be breached. Castro knew about Retalhuleu as soon as *La Hora* did, and quite likely sooner; and he was in the fortunate position of not having to verify his information with such as President Ydígoras. The early apathy of the press makes sense only when viewed as motivated not so much by patriotic reticence as by eager jingoistic collaboration. The fact is that most powerful American publishers wanted that damn Castro out of there as much as Allen W. Dulles did. So they kept silent until the few independent souls among them precipitated the news compe-

tion that is the normal lifeblood of the industry. But the damage had already been done: *public opinion had been eliminated as a factor in a major foreign policy decision.*

Even today most journalists, with some honorable exceptions, criticize the Bay of Pigs not as the wrong thing to have done, but as the wrong way to have done it. One is reminded of most current criticism of the Vietnam war: the cure suggested is always something other than the simple getting out. It is difficult to accept that there is no right way of doing the wrong thing.

Where, then, does the duty of the press lie? Must it always tell all that it knows? Or are there occasions when government, as representative of the people, has the moral right to call upon its discretion? President Kennedy was not alone in his feeling that the press should suppress news in the interest of the government (which is assumed to be identified with the national interest). But back in 1851 that old Thunderer, *The Times of London*, had something to say on this subject:

The purposes and duties of the [Ministers of the Crown and of the Press] are constantly separate, generally independent, sometimes diametrically opposite. . . . The Press can enter into no close or binding alliances with the statesmen of the day, nor can it surrender its permanent interests to the convenience of the ephemeral power of any Government. The first duty of the Press is to obtain the earliest and most correct intelligence of the events of the time, and instantly, by disclosing them, to make them the common property of the nation. The statesman collects his information secretly and by secret means; he keeps back even the current intelligence of the day with ludicrous precautions. . . . The Press lives by disclosures.

This is a generally admirable statement of a condition that should exist, perhaps, but doesn't. The fact is that most of the press decides for or against cooperation with government not on any basis of principle, but on the basis of the issue. Do we, the editor asks himself, approve or disapprove of what the government is asking us to help it do? So William F. Buckley Jr., alerted to secret peace negotiations between Washington and Hanoi, and fearing an outcome favorable to the Communists, might rush to wreck the talks by publicizing them. Walter Lippmann, in all likelihood, might keep his mouth shut. Who has best served journalism and the public weal? On the other hand, who best served journalism and the public weal in the months before the Bay of Pigs—those who talked, or those who kept silent?