

LIFE

**RAW UNTOLD TRUTH
BY MEN WHO FOUGHT
Bay of Pigs**

**Heartbreaking Price
They Paid for
U.S. Miscalculations**

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A SEQUEL TO THE BAY OF PIGS

Four U.S. pilots—they died while 'serving their country'

by BILL SURFACE

The confused, controversial story of the four American fliers who were killed in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion finally drew verification from the White House last week. President Kennedy said that the airmen died while "serving their country as volunteers." But, he added, it would not be helpful to the U.S. to go into details at this time.

If the facts of the fatal mission were to be kept locked in government files, the opinions—and emotions—of those close to the dead fliers were revealed in interviews in Birmingham, Ala. Three of the four widows have lived there since the disappearance of their husbands. A fourth, Mrs. Catherine Baker, moved to California and is now in seclusion. All have been receiving twice-a-month pensions of \$225 and up—and nothing is known of the source of this money except that it is paid through the Bankers Trust Co. in New York. For these women, their families and friends, the long ordeal of doubt and grief has turned into resentment over recent head-

lines and the government's official silence. This is what they say:

MRS. MARION JANE SHAMBURGER, 37, is the widow of Riley W. Shamburger, who had been a test pilot for Hayes Aircraft Corp. in Birmingham and a major in the Alabama Air National Guard. She said: "I never suspected a thing until a few days after the Cuban business. I came home and the maid had let this man in. He said he was a lawyer from the Double Check Corp. of Miami and that Riley and the other three boys had been flying cargo. They were last heard from on April 19—our 15th wedding anniversary—and had radioed the engine was going out. Later we received death certificates and I held a memorial service.

"I've accepted the fact that Riley's gone and this is the way he would have wanted to die. Riley'd be disappointed in me if I talked too much about it. But I'll tell you one thing—I don't believe that business about the engine going out and Riley losing altitude. Anyone at Hayes can tell you Riley brought planes in with an engine on fire and then went out and

played golf a few minutes later.

"Riley was a good pilot and was making good money before he was involved in this thing. I got Candy [her daughter, 15] a new car and I got one, too, but I can't stand to get rid of the old one. I don't think it's been away from the front of the house since Riley went down."

MRS. RILEY W. SHAMBURGER SR., 63, mother of Pilot Shamburger, holds to the hope that her son is still alive in Cuba. She wrote President Kennedy and received an answer from Brig. General Godfrey McHugh of the Air Force, stating that he could give her no pertinent information. "I don't want anything secret," she said. "All I want to know is, is Riley dead or alive?"

MRS. VIOLET GRAY, 35, widow of Wade C. Gray, has denied that her husband was a "soldier of fortune," as the four have been described, but declined to make further comment. Her silence was explained by her friend, **MRS. MARGARET RAY**, 31, widow of Thomas W. (Pete) Ray and the mother of two children. "Violet Gray came by here the other night," said Mrs. Ray, "and we drove over to Jane Shamburger's. The three of us talked it over and agreed that the publicity is shocking. We can't let it go on. The kids turn on TV and see a news show and it frightens them."



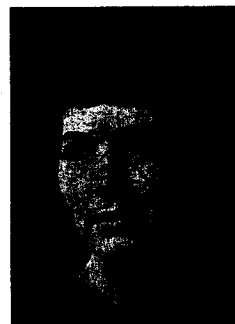
MRS. SHAMBURGER. After her husband (in portrait) disappeared, she was told talking might harm others.

ALBERT (BUCK) PERSONS, 47, a former Army Air Corps captain and now editor of *The Examiner*, a weekly newspaper in Birmingham, himself participated in air plans for the Bay of Pigs invasion. A friend of all four pilots, Persons in February wrote an account in his newspaper of his role in the invasion. He told of the deaths of the fliers but did not tell their names. "I can't help resenting the deliberate implications that these four men died because they ran off on an irresponsible personal adventure just to make a few bucks," he says now. "They were experienced in their jobs and passed security checks. We felt we had been selected by our government for a job helping the national security.

("Those so-called mystery checks for the widows—no mystery to them. They were part of the deal.) Eighteen Americans were invited into this. We had a contract and got paid. We also were promised that in event of our deaths, our widows would receive \$550 monthly until they remarry.")

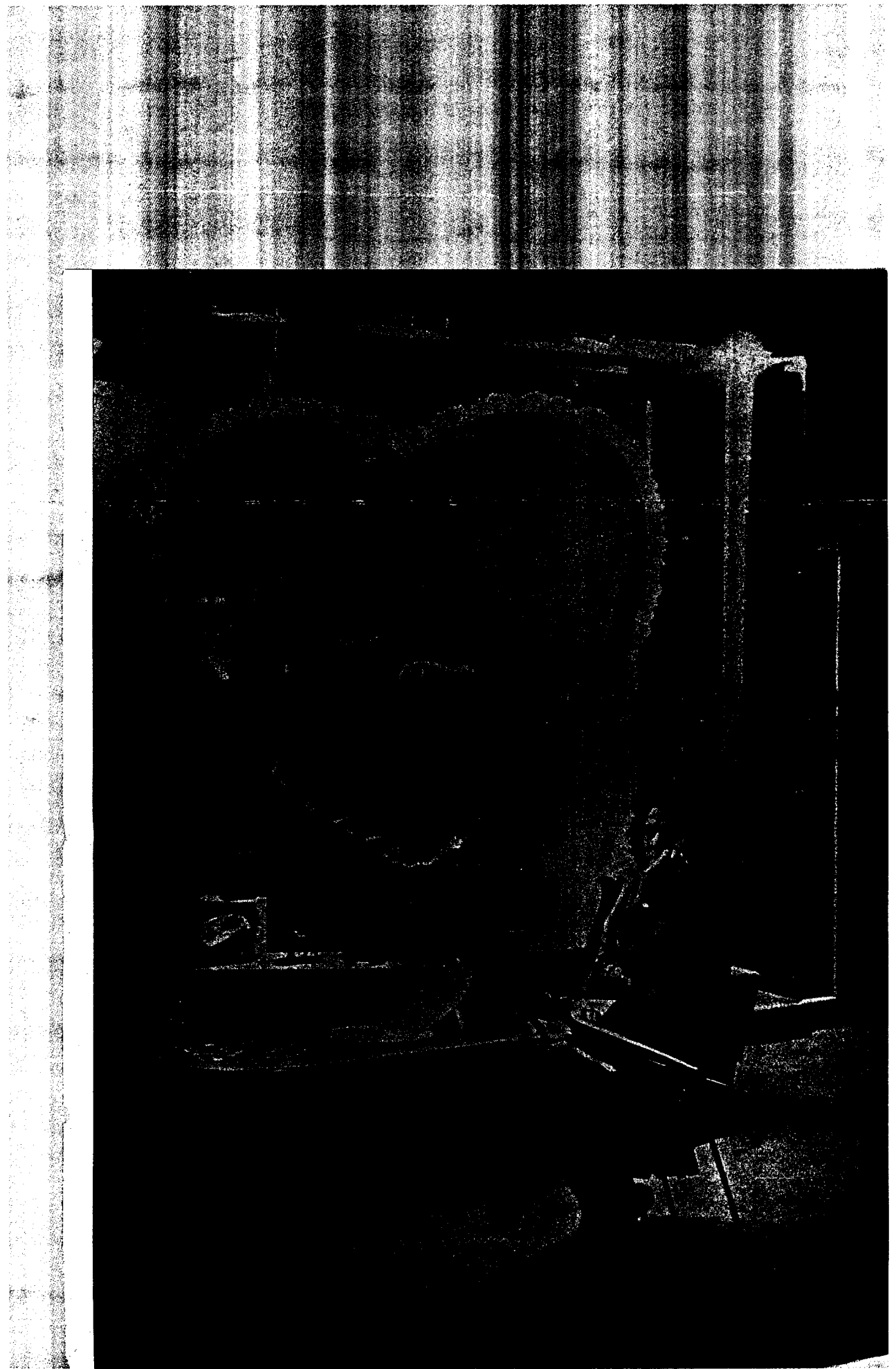
("Those four Americans who died were in two of the six planes that took off from Nicaragua for the Bay of Pigs. Five of the six planes were piloted and navigated by Americans, one by a Cuban. I firmly believe that the men died feeling they would have air support from carrier-based jets nearby.")

("I feel strongly that the children of the airmen should grow up knowing how their fathers died and for what cause. I deliberately withheld names in my story hoping that some responsible person—maybe the President—would announce them. I don't think their names should have to come out this way, two years later.")



MRS. GRAY. Her husband Wade said he was going to test-fly planes when he left for the Cuban invasion.

RAY FAMILY. Wife Margaret, daughter Janet, 8, son Tommy, 9, knew only that Pete Ray was on secret job.





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EDITORS' NOTE

Tracking Down Those Who Fought

The reporter who spearheaded the team that produced our Bay of Pigs story this week (p. 20) was Mathilde Camacho. "Dita," as we call her, was born in Paris and speaks five languages. She has had her own war experiences—she walked most of the way across the Pyrenees in 1940 to escape the Nazis—and was able to establish a close rapport with the battleworn Cuban survivors.

In one interview that took place in a motel in Miami, she won the confidence of a young prisoner released by Castro. Little by little, he opened up. When the interview ended, the young man's parents emerged from an adjoining room where they had been listening. There were tears in the mother's eyes, and the father wrung Dita's hand. "Thank you for having done this," the father said. "It is the first time our son has talked of this, the first time we have learned of the horrors he experienced."

This young survivor was one of the many who told us their stories in a coverage that grew into a mountain of reporting work. Miguel Acoca of our Miami bureau, who comes from Panama, specialized in seeking out such men as "The Egg," the legendary tank driver whose exploits run through the story. In between helping out with the interviews, Acoca took on the job of tracking down documentary evidence. Intermediaries led to intermediaries, and the long and winding trail finally produced the actual battle plan (pp. 24, 25). Acoca also laid hands on personal diaries that even Castro's jailers had not been able to seize.

Then came the job of putting it all together. First, Artist Sanford Kossin, a Navy veteran of World War II, was asked to re-create the battle scenes, and to do this he checked details and descriptions with many of the Cubans. One of them, inspecting his interpretations, was moved to say: "My God! That's exactly the way it was!"

All the research came to the office of our military editor, John Dille. From the beginning of the U.S. space program Dille has been in the thick of our coverage of the Astronauts. With them, he is the author of the book *We Seven*. In the Bay of Pigs project, as he assembled and wrote the narration, Dille held court for a steady stream of Cubans. One morning a sign appeared on his door: CASTRONAUT EDITOR.



CAMACHO
Reporter



ACOCA
Reporter



KOSSIN
Artist



DILLE
Editor

George P. Hunt

GEORGE P. HUNT
Managing Editor



LIFE

Vol. 54, No. 19 May 10, 1963

**The Untold Battle Story
of the Men on the Beach
at the Bay of Pigs**

THE UNTOLD

At midnight on April 16, 1961, Cuban patriots landed on a remote beach of their homeland. Their mission: to liberate Cuba. Much has been reported—and speculated—about the debacle, but the missing ingredient has been the full account of what actually happened on the beaches as remembered by the men who fought there. This remarkable story—often heroic, always chaotic and finally heart-rending—begins in this drawing as the first assault wave wades ashore past a dead Castro sentry.





With a Quiet Curse It All Began

by JOHN DILLE

Along the southern coast of Cuba the tide rolled in, carrying the familiar sea sounds to the darkened resort and fishing villages. It was near midnight of a moonless Sunday; the five men in the rubber boat were approaching their designated stretch of shore line right on schedule.

In frogmen's suits they crouched uncomfortably with their cargo—rifles, ammunition, battery-powered signal lights—and peered at the dim outline of their homeland. About 20 yards from shore the boat scraped against a reef. One of the men cursed quietly—they had been assured there were no reefs where they would come in. The leader of the group, a tall, thin Cuban named José Alonso Lamar, cut the motor and guided the boat toward shore.

Suddenly the frogmen became aware of an unwelcome reception ahead of them: a Jeep was ap-

proaching the beach from the little resort town of Playa Girón, its headlights throwing a menacing streak across the water. The Jeep came to a stop with its lights beamed directly at the boat. Alonso and his companions jumped into the water and rushed toward the vehicle, firing their rifles at the bright pools of light. The attack took a quick toll of the Jeep's occupants. One man was killed; two who were wounded, as well as a frightened, dazed boy, were taken prisoner.

Alonso's team began setting up their signal lights to mark the route for the landing craft. But the attack on the Jeep had alerted the beach guard and from behind the black sea wall a machine gun opened up, raking the area where the frogmen worked. Alonso radioed for supporting machine-gun fire from the escort ship *Blagar*, which was waiting in the darkness offshore. Soon the resort beach at (Girón) was a battlefield. Under the steady covering fire from *Blagar*, the first troops of (Brigade 2506) came ashore, stumbling through the surf after the bottoms of their three landing craft were ripped open by the reefs.

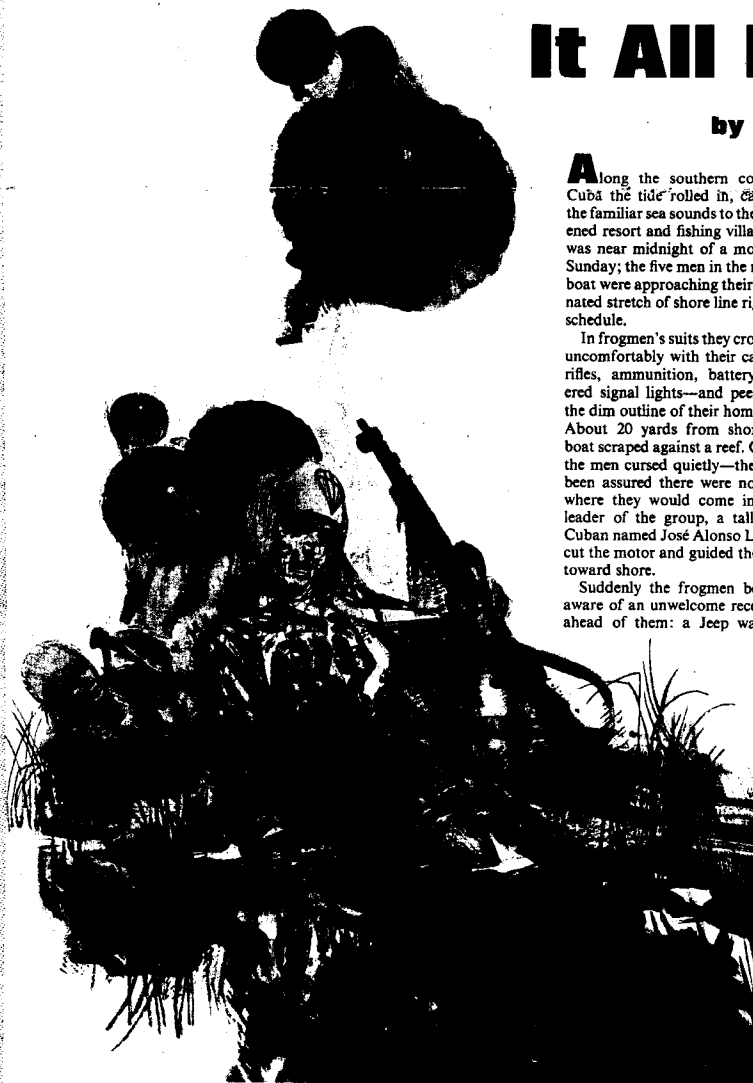
The immediate beach defenses were soon overcome, but the reefs, hidden by the high tide, remained a dangerous threat to the invaders. Frogman Alonso hurried to warn Brigade Commander José (Pepe) Pérez San Román as soon as he landed.

"The coral is as sharp as blades," Alonso said. "We'll lose everything unless we wait for daylight and low tide."

Pepe agreed. He radioed the ships to stay where they were. The Bay of Pigs invasion came to a grinding, frustrating halt.

The delay caused by the reefs was only a small part of the chaos of a three-day battle that ended in total disaster for the invaders—and for the U.S. government which secretly trained, equipped and directed them to the beaches) Certain details of the Administration's

are Carlo speech



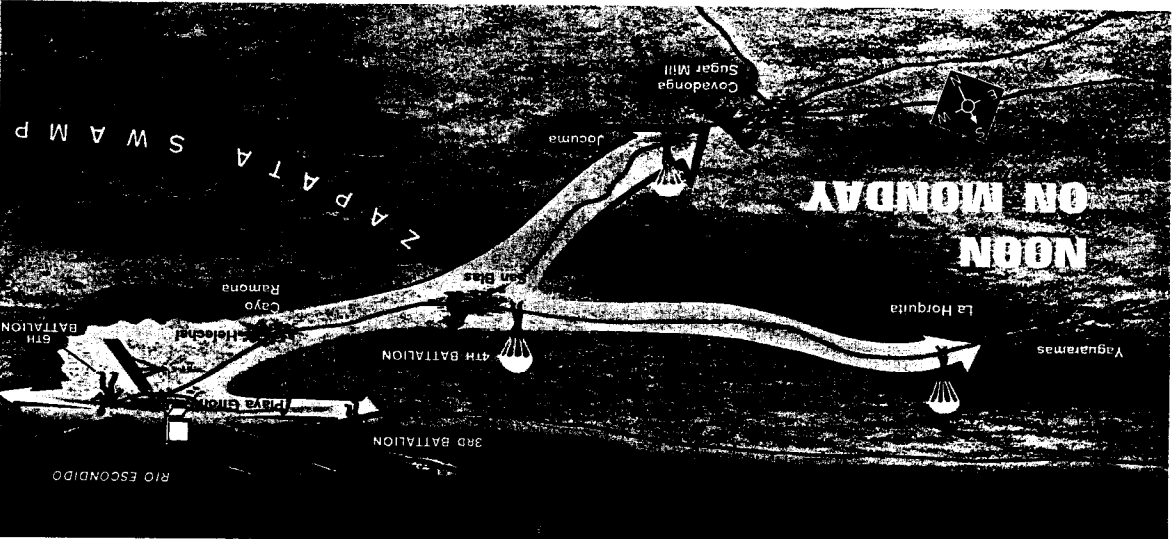
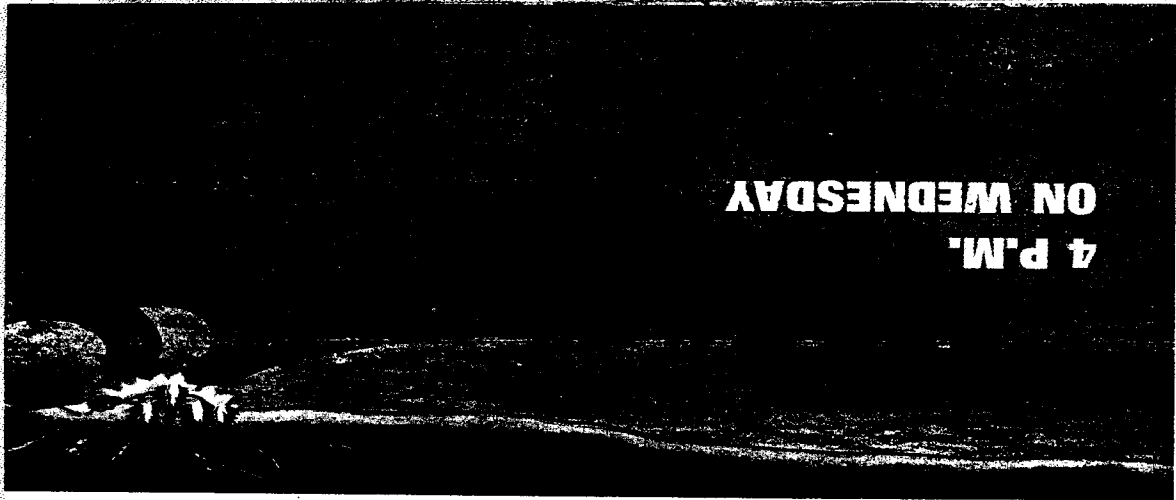
Enemy Jeep Lights Stab the Night

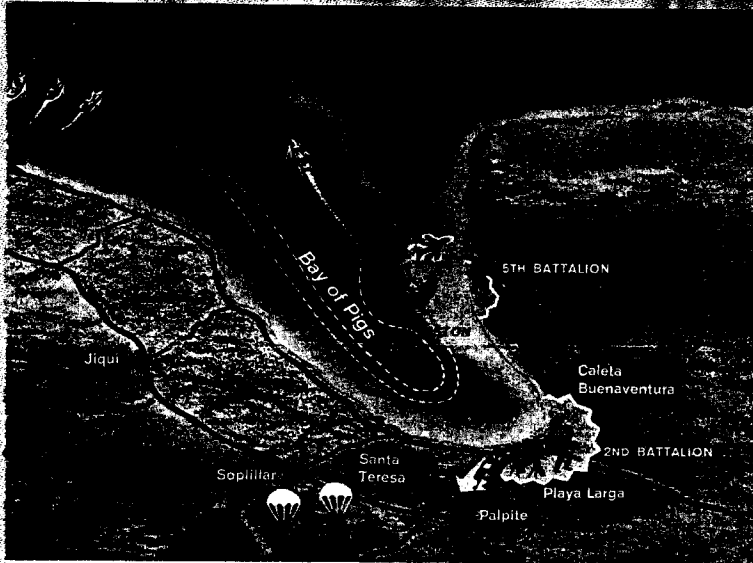
From the start the invaders run into serious trouble. Jeep headlights turned on by Castro's militia blind them as they stumble ashore at Playa Larga (left). Their landing boats, equipped with faulty outboard engines, are cracking up on the reefs, and they have to shoot

their way onto the beach against an entrenched enemy. North of Playa Larga, the brigade's paratroopers miss their landing point and sink to their knees in a slimy swamp. The men's guns are clogged with mud, equipment is lost, and these paratroopers never get into battle.

Paintings for LIFE by SANFORD KOSSIN

**TEXT CONTINUED
ON PAGE 27**





THE PLAN IS TO SEIZE ROADS

The invasion plan called for paratroopers to land on the roads near San Blas, Yaguaramas and Júcuma (*far left*) and at Pálpite in the west. The infantry battalions would land by sea to link up with the paratroopers and reinforce the defenses. The impenetrable Zapata Swamp would prevent Castro from attacking except along the roads. The plan worked well in the east. The paratroopers hit their targets and were joined by the Fourth Battalion which landed at Girón. The Sixth Battalion also landed at Girón to protect brigade headquarters; the Third Battalion set up a roadblock on the coastal road east of Girón. But in the west the paratroopers missed Pálpite, leaving the route into Playa Larga wide open. The Second Battalion landed at Playa Larga, but the Fifth, which was due to join it, was forced to swim ashore farther south when a Castro jet sank the *Houston*. The *Rta Excondido* was sunk off Girón and the other ships took off, leaving the brigade stranded.



PLANS FALTER, PERIMETER SHRINKS

Overnight the situation deteriorates on the two fronts. In the east (*at far left*) the brigade is forced to give up its roadblocks on both the Covadonga and Yaguaramas roads and pull back toward San Blas. In the west (*at right*) Castro's forces take advantage of the relatively open road into Playa Larga and force the Second Battalion to retreat to Girón. Now, with the fall of Playa Larga, Communist troops move over back roads through Sopiillar and Jiqui as well as along the coastal road toward Girón. San Blas is under heavy fire from mortars and artillery. Girón is being hit by Castro's planes. Though under fire, the airport outside Girón is theoretically available for use. According to the plan, the brigade's B-26s were to transfer their operations here from Nicaragua, 720 miles to the south, in order to extend their flying time over the battlefield. But because the ships did not unload equipment and aviation fuel at Girón, the field never got into operation.



THE LAST POSITION CRUMBLES

Now the end is at hand. The brigade has pulled back into Girón. Castro's armor has pushed along the coastal road from Playa Larga into the outskirts of Girón, and his air force swoops in to attack. San Blas is evacuated at about 2 p.m. The Fifth Battalion is still hung up on its own private beachhead, but the rest of the brigade is trying to escape capture. Some try to reach the mountains. Others hide in the brush and swamps or head out to sea in small boats to try to reach two U.S. destroyers cruising back and forth on the horizon. According to the plan, if the brigade could hold out for 72 hours it would declare the beachhead to be Free Cuba and appeal to the free world for help. But it is only 64 hours since the battle began and Castro has thrown the full might of his armor and artillery to crush the last pocket of resistance.



Jets Howl in As Men Leap for Their Lives

At dawn on the first morning
Castro's air force wings into action.
At Girón a British-built Sea
Fury belonging to Cuba chases
a C-46 cargo plane (above, left)
which has just dropped paratroopers

into battle. The ships open fire
and the Sea Fury crashes.
At Playa Larga, a U.S.-built T-33 jet—
(inherited from the Batista
regime)—bombs the transport
Houston (below). Men of the





Fifth Battalion jump overboard to swim ashore. A Castro jet also sank another transport, the *Río Escudido*. Loss of the ships and their supplies was the turning point. While the air battle was



still going on, men of the Second Battalion, firing from their roadblock (right) outside Playa Larga, knock out a truck full of *milicianos* as it roars down the road in a fruitless counterattack.



TEXT CONTINUED FROM PAGE 23

involvement in the ill-fated adventure are well known. But President Kennedy, who has accepted ultimate responsibility for the fiasco, has not released a complete report on the invasion and the extent of the government's participation in it.

While individual soldiers admittedly cannot be authoritative interpreters of the over-all course of battle, eyewitness accounts do give dramatic dimension to the story of war. In this instance their perspective raises questions and charges which have been met by Washington officials (see summary of their reactions on page 80) and by an official document (page 34).

But the facts revealed here prove there was a shocking breakdown in communications between the planners and the men in the field, and that almost everybody was guilty of miscalculation:

► The breakdown of communications was most dramatic on the point of air cover. Long before the start of the invasion, the men of the brigade received from their trainers and advisers in the field promises of U.S. air cover; they say they continued to get such promises until just before the fighting ended. The crucial help never came. On the second day of the battle three U.S. Navy jets appeared over the combat area, dipped their wings and flew off.

► A troopship of U.S. Marines stood off the invasion coast within sight and sound of the battle before it was finally ordered away. The ship's presence was confirmed by a handful of brigade survivors, who were picked up by the destroyer U.S.S. *Eaton* and transferred to the troopship. They learned that the



Marines had been on a "mission" and had expected to see action. ► When the brigade commander made a desperate plea for covering fire from the U.S. Navy on the final day of battle, he was asked to provide a list of targets and their priority—but the support never came. ► The battle plan (see maps pp. 24, 25) drawn up by CIA officials and endorsed by the Pentagon was tactically sound—although the question has been asked: why did the plan call for a landing at night? (During all of World War II, no important amphibious landing was attempted in darkness.) Also, with

hindsight it is clear that successful execution depended upon everything going right at the right time. (There was no margin for error.) When the men encountered unpredicted trouble—with reefs and from *milicianos* who were on the beaches in greater numbers than expected—the plan began to unravel at the start. ► [Aboard ship en route to the beaches the brigade got the heartening news that 75% to 80% of Castro's airpower had been destroyed in a pre-invasion raid.] (Actually not more than half had been destroyed.) Castro still had an air



INVASION

CONTINUED

force of three T-33 jets, two Sea Furies and two B-26s. These few planes were decisive. Castro's air attacks later knocked out two of the invasion ships. Down with them went crucial supplies, including ammunition.)

► Despite the loss of the two heavily laden ships, the brigade would have had enough supplies on other

vessels to accomplish its mission. But the other supply ships were ordered by their advisers to leave the scene. Result: many of the soldiers on the beaches ran out of ammunition within the first 24 hours.)

► Even without adequate supplies or U.S. air cover in support of the brigade's own B-26s, the men fought courageously and well. Their casualties, estimated at 6% to 7%, were apparently far less than those suffered by Castro's

army. The men still believe that with the help of two or three U.S. jets they could have succeeded.

► On the last day of battle (four volunteer American pilots flew brigade planes in relief of exhausted Cuban pilots.) All were killed. (The pilots vainly called for help from a nearby U.S. carrier before they were shot down.)

(The Cuban Brigade, made up of about 1,400 patriotic refugees from

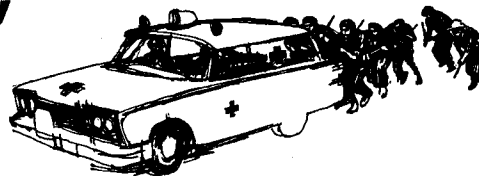
Castro's island) included six infantry battalions, a heavy weapons detachment and headquarters personnel. This was no conquering army, but it was hoped the men would be able to secure the beach for 72 hours, during which period a government would be established.) (It was expected that this free government would be recognized by the nations of the hemisphere which then, upon request, could and would supply the necessary



Bombing, Strafing B-26s Attack a Castro Convoy

On the afternoon of the first day two brigade World War II B-26s bomb and strafe a convoy of Castro troops that is trying to break through a brigade roadblock (far left) outside Playa Larga. The vehicles burst into

flame and about 500 of Castro's men are killed or wounded. The *milicianos* asked for a truce to remove their casualties, and the invaders agreed. But when enemy troops tried to follow behind the ambulance (right), the brigade shot them up.



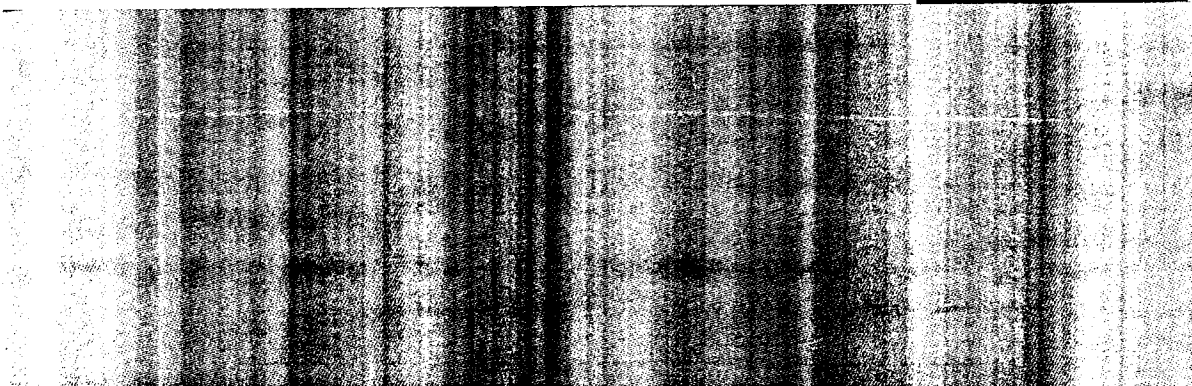
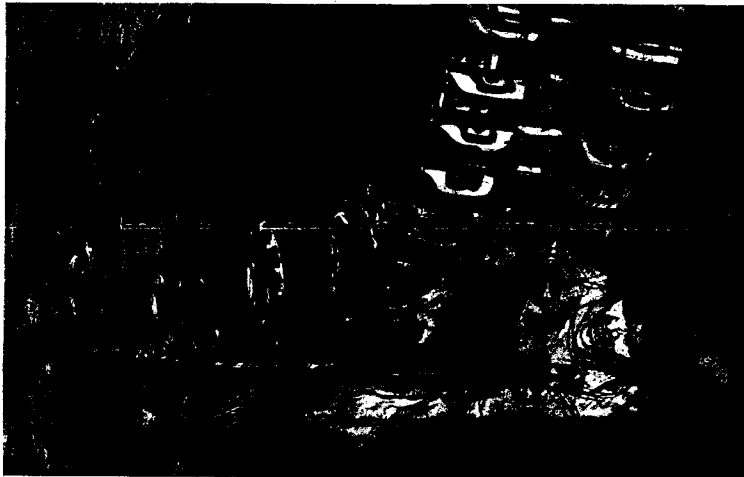


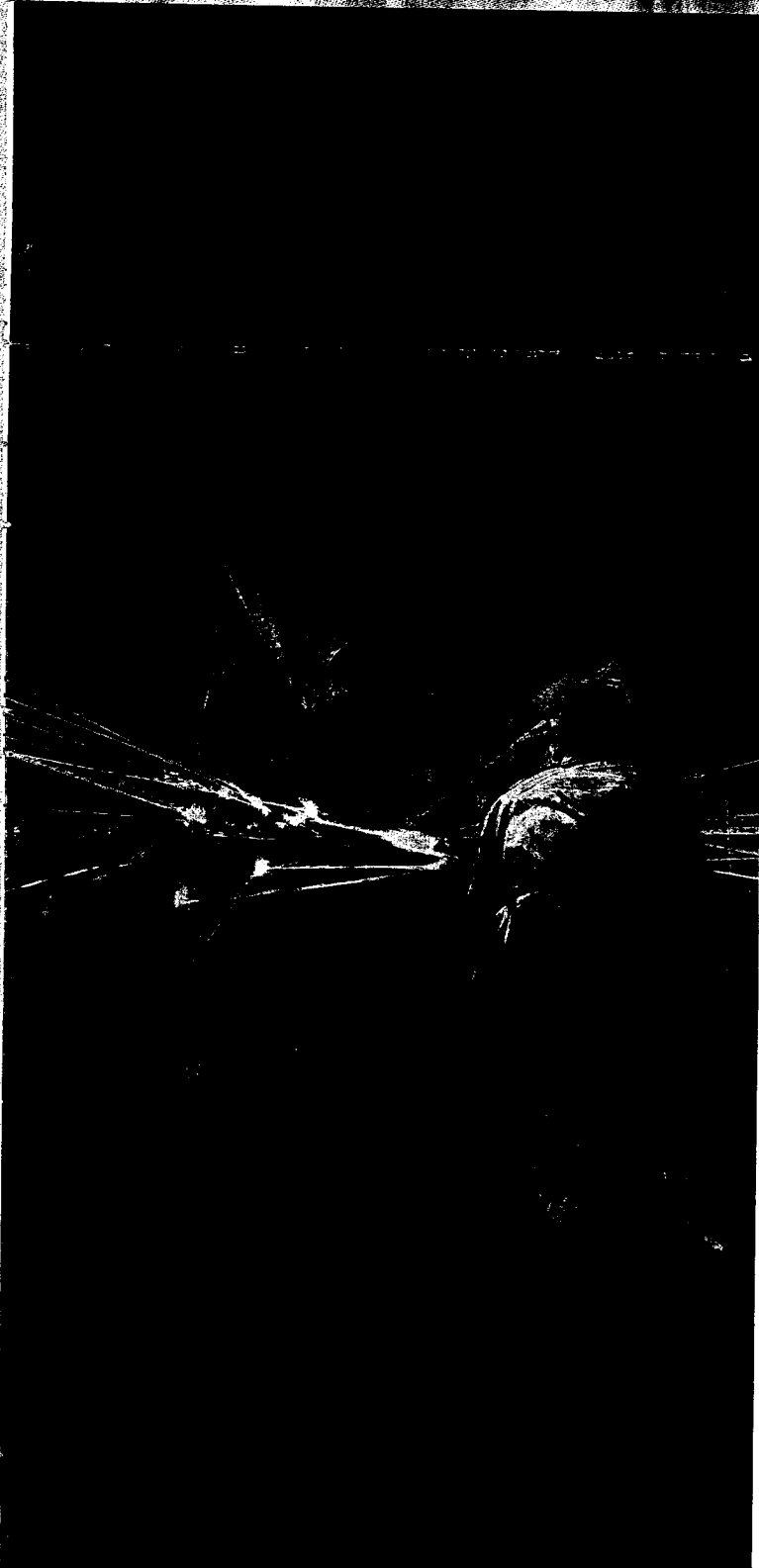
In Night of Horror Reds Crush Their Own Wounded

Monday night, the first full night of combat, is a nightmare on both major sectors (see map, pp. 24, 25) as the opposing forces battle at pointblank range. When a Castro lieutenant (above) stands in the glare of his own headlights near San Blas

to demand the surrender of Carlos Reynaldo, a brigade machine gunner, Reynaldo furiously cuts him in two. (At Playa Larga, a brigade company commander uses tracers to mark the outline of a Russian tank (right) so his bazooka teams can find

it and knock it out. And as Castro's tanks continue to attack on the road into Playa Larga, the tank crews obey Communist orders to keep moving ahead and to run over their own wounded if necessary—which they do (below).





INVASION

CONTINUED

military help. At the same time the Cuban people would rally and stand against Castro.

(The brigade had been trained in Guatemala for nine months by military technicians who were under the supervision of U.S. advisers.) (The advisers wore civilian dress and were known to the soldiers only by their first names.) Training completed, the men and their materiel were transferred to a staging area in Nicaragua.

(The crack unit was the First Battalion, consisting of 173 paratroopers. However, a few late recruits had never before jumped from a plane and the battalion commander, like most of the others in the brigade, had never led troops in combat.) The Second, Third, Fourth and Fifth Battalions, of approximately 180 men each, had gone through varying periods of combat training. (The Sixth Battalion had so many green young volunteers that it was not originally expected to take part in the operation.) The armor consisted of five medium M-41 tanks with four-man crews, who had been selected from the regular volunteers and given brief special training in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. (Since the brigade's own ships were not big enough to carry the tanks, it must be assumed that U.S. Navy vessels transported them to the invasion area and put them ashore in landing barges.) The heavy weapons detachment, which was not equipped with armored vehicles, was broken up and small units were assigned to the various battalions.

The brigade's air arm was a clumsy collection of 15 B-26 bombers without fighter support. Each of the B-26s carried 3,000 pounds of bombs, 3,000 rounds of 50-caliber machine-gun ammunition and was equipped with eight five-inch rockets on the wings. (Unfortunately, the staging base in Nicaragua (code name, Happy Valley) was 720 miles from the beaches.) (The bombers had to commute for nearly four hours before they could fire a shot.) (To lighten the load and make room for more fuel, the tail-gun positions were removed from the planes, leaving them defenseless against attack from the rear.) (Even so, their fuel supply permitted them only 30 to 40 minutes over the invasion area before they had to return to Happy Valley for refueling.) However, the invasion plans called for an early capture of Castro's airfield outside Girón so that the brigade's planes would have a place to land and refuel.

Four days before D-Day, on April 13, the brigade invasion force set sail from Nicaragua in an unlikely armada. Five small freighters

These Brave Men Endowed the Outfit with



Valentin Bacallao, 28, commanded the brigade's Fourth Battalion, is now lieutenant in the U.S. Army.



Jorge Alvarez Viltre, called "The Egg" by his comrades, had top of his ear sliced off in a tank battle.



Gonzalo Herrera, a pilot who flew on the last mission with four Americans, is now in the U.S. Air Force.



Carlos Rodriguez, 25, was killed in training. Brigade took his serial number, 2506 as its designation.



Hugo Sueiro commanded the Second Battalion on the Playa Larga front, is a lieutenant in U.S. Marines.



Luis Morse, captain of ill-fated *Houston*, now lives in Miami with son Luisito, who fought at Playa Larga.

INVASION CONTINUED

At 8 a.m., while the Fifth was still waiting to disembark from the *Houston*, a Castro jet took advantage of the unprotected target riding the waves in the Bay of Pigs. As the plane approached on its attack run, Rifleman Manuel Hernández Cruz, a former basketball star in Cuba, was standing in the shadow of the ship's funnel, looking up into the sky.

"I remember they always told us planes come out of the sun," Hernández said. "Well, this one did and it was right over us. It was one of the T-33s [training jets] that Batista had got from the Americans. I think a rocket hit the water first, then bounced into the ship. Another one of our men was holding onto the railing waiting for coffee. I saw him turn his head when he heard the plane. Then the machine-gun bullets hit him and he died. I wanted to touch him because he still looked alive. He was hanging on to the rail and looking over his shoulder at where the plane had come from. But a doctor who was standing next to him said he was dead."

The ship's commander, Luis Morse, was also on deck taking a coffee break when the attack struck. "I was holding a coffee pot in one hand," he said, "and was about to pour a cup for the quartermaster when we felt a tremendous impact and then machine-gun bullets splattered across the deck. My friend dropped his cup and I chided him for breaking our dishes. I leaned over the port side and saw a gaping

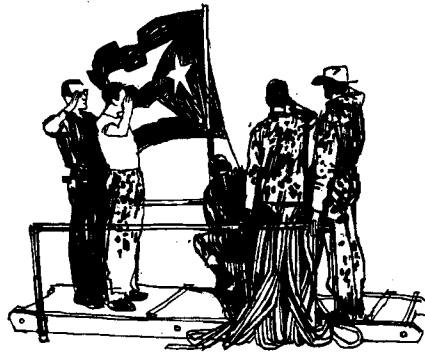
hole near the water line. I could also see oil spreading out over the water. I poured myself more coffee and gulped it down—you never know when you can get another cup of coffee—then I went to check on the damage."

Morse ordered the lifeboats out—two big ones and a small one—but one of the large boats capsized and the men left on *Houston* started to jump overboard. Thinking their ship was on fire, some of the crew got out a hose and tried to pump water into the hold. But the hose was so riddled with bullet holes from the strafing that it proved useless; Morse finally succeeded in beaching *Houston* on the reefs to prevent her from sinking. The Fifth Battalion got off the ship safely and swam ashore. However,

(the battalion was a good 12 miles south of its destination of Playa Larga and the men were without guns, ammunition or even most of their clothing.)

Between them and their rendezvous point was stationed a force of *militianos*, who effectively blocked their way. Exhausted by this ordeal and lacking new orders from brigade headquarters or firm decisions from their own command, men of the Fifth never did link up to their companions fighting up the beach. They stayed where they were.

The loss of *Houston* with its critical supplies was followed by another disaster off Girón. At 9:07 a.m., a T-33 dove on *Río Escondido*, which had just discharged the last of the Sixth Battalion. The plane hit the tiny freighter with two



Before invasion Washington was told (see document below) that brigade's morale was high. It was—and on way to beach (Brigade Commander San Román (right) jubilantly raises flag in mistaken belief that Castro's air force is knocked out.)

rockets. (Within five minutes the crew abandoned ship, which quickly went down with her cargo of aviation fuel, bombs, antitank mines and radio transmitting equipment.)

After *Río Escondido* dropped from sight the captains of the other transports received the order to leave. *Atlántico*, *Caribe*, *Lake Charles* and *Blagar* turned their sterns to the beaches and headed for open water. (*Barbara J.* had already been ordered away.) (With them went the brigade's reserve ammunition.) (The men were now left with the equipment they had been able to carry ashore—and to their own resources.) It wasn't long before they had to piece out their scant ammunition with much patience and great courage.

MONDAY MID-MORNING

Outside Playa Larga the Second Battalion was too busy killing the enemy to wonder when or if the Fifth was going to arrive. Castro's army kept rolling down the road in trucks (see drawing on page 27) straight into the gunsights of the brigade. It was obvious to the men of the Second that the paratroopers had not established their roadblock up ahead. But it mattered little as long as the enemy was so obligingly stupid in its method of attack.

"One of our best gunners in the battalion," said Pedro Porraspita, "was a little guy named Gilberto

**TEXT CONTINUED
ON PAGE 69**

Newest Evidence for the History Books: IT RULED OUT U.S. INTERVENTION

The following document, formerly classified, was obtained last week by LIFE and is the official record of communications exchanged on the eve of the Bay of Pigs invasion between Washington and a U.S. military officer serving as adviser to President Kennedy. The exchange took place on April 13, 1961, just before the brigade put to sea and four days before the landing in Cuba. (The message from Washington confirmed that there would be no intervention by U.S. forces.) The reply, which follows it, assured the President that no such intervention would be needed. Names and places have been deleted for security reasons.

1. Following is the text of a precedence EMERGENCY cable sent to [redacted] at [redacted] on 13 April 1961 by the Project chief:

(a) Please advise EMERGENCY

precedence if your experiences have in any way changed your evaluation of the brigade in the last few days.

(b) For your information: the President has stated that under no conditions will the U.S. intervene with any U.S. forces.)

2. Following is the text of the reply from [redacted] of the same day.

(a) 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.

(b) The brigade and battalion commanders now know all details of the plan and are enthusiastic. These officers are young, vigorous, intelligent and motivated with a fanatical urge to begin battle. Most of them have been preparing under

rugged conditions of training for almost a year.) They say they know their own people and believe after they have inflicted one serious defeat upon the opposition forces, the latter will melt away from Castro, whom they have no wish to support. They say it is a Cuban tradition to join a winner and they have supreme confidence they will win against anything Castro has to offer. I share their confidence.

(c) The brigade is well organized and more heavily armed and better equipped in some respects than U.S. infantry units. (The men have received intensive training in the use of their weapons, including more firing experience than U.S. troops would normally receive.) I was impressed with the serious attitude of the men as they arrived here and moved to their ships. Movements were quiet and efficient. The

embarkation was carried out with remarkable smoothness.

(d) The brigade now numbers 1,400; a truly formidable force.

(e) I have also observed the [Brigade] Cuban Air Force carefully. The aircraft are kept with pride, and some of the crews are so eager they have already armed their aircraft. [redacted] informed me today that he considers the B-26 squadron equal to the best U.S. Air Force squadron.

(f) The brigade officers do not expect help from U.S. Armed Forces. (They ask only for continued delivery of supplies. This can be done covertly.)

(g) (This [Brigade] Cuban Air Force is well trained, armed to the teeth and ready. I believe profoundly that it would be a serious mistake for the United States to deter it from its purposes.)

BAY OF PIGS INVASION CONTINUED FROM PAGE 34

'Keep Your Compliments,

Give Us Jets!'

Hernández. He used to cut our hair down at the camp in Guatemala, so we called him *Barberito*—or 'Little Barber.' A big trailer-truck full of *milicianos* came roaring down the road and *Barberito* let them have it. First he hit the truck with a high-explosive shell. He wasn't satisfied with that, so he hit it again with a white phosphorus shell that blew up the engine and scattered hot sparks all over. Our battalion commander, Hugo Suiro, liked the arrangement so much he sent back for a bigger gun—a 75-mm recoilless rifle. *Barberito* had been using a 57-mm. The new gun arrived just in time for *Barberito* to knock out another truck full of Castro soldiers. We were doing pretty well there."

In brigade headquarters, which had been set up in the municipal clubhouse at Girón, Pepe San Román worried about the Second Battalion which had already radioed for tank support. With the Fifth Battalion and the paratroopers out of the show, he knew he would soon have to get help to the Second, that it wouldn't be long before Castro's heavy guns came down the open road. He ordered tank driver Hugo Román Acevedo, who had been guarding the headquarters area, to drive as fast as he could to Playa Larga.

"I was the first tank to show up in Playa Larga," said Hugo, "and when the men saw us coming, they ran out to my tank and kissed it. I drove out north of town where the *milicianos* were shooting at our guys, and began firing into the bushes to the left of the road. (We hadn't had any real trouble with the tank up until then, but now the loading mechanism broke down. The gadget that cocks the firing pin fell apart. From then on we had to use a knife to pry the old shell out before we could stick in a new one.) (That slowed us down—it took us several seconds to fire a round, reach for the knife, reload, cock the mechanism and fire again.)"

The sight of Hugo's tank bucked up the troops at Playa Larga, and the sound of its shells whamming into targets added a badly needed professional touch to their side of the battle. (The men now knew about the lost ships and about the critical lack of supplies.)

The appearance of the tank was as much a morale booster as it was a weapon. One of the men approached Erneido Oliva, a tall young Negro who was second in command of the brigade and was the officer in charge of the Playa Larga front.

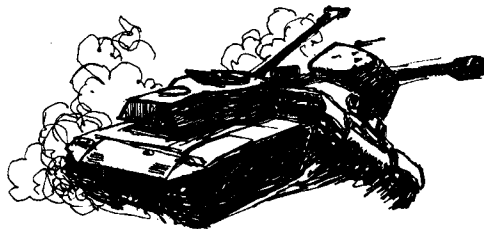
"Maybe there will be a miracle and everything will turn out all right," he said anxiously.

Oliva laughed and shook his

situation spotted a column of about 200 *milicianos* approaching. Paratrooper leader José Guerra sent a runner to San Blas asking for reinforcements; then he dug in for the attack.

"I knew we had to stay," he said. "We had orders to hold the position until we died."

Reinforcements—one tank and a small band of infantry—were ordered to help Guerra. (As they ap-



Out of ammunition, a U.S. tank (left) from the brigade rams into a Soviet tank belonging to Castro and knocks it out of action.

head. "Don't be foolish. There are no miracles at a time like this."

MONDAY AFTERNOON

The mid-April heat covered the combat zone, pressing down on the tank crews in their steel cocoons, parching the throats of the paratroopers stuck in the swamps, intensifying the ugly smells of explosives and death. After the cold and fear of the long night and early morning, the men in the brigade now began to feel the weariness of battle. But on the roads leading north and east out of Girón and San Blas into Castro country, the brigade finally had the satisfaction of achieving an objective. (Although they lacked the land mines they needed to block the roads leading through the swamps, infantrymen of the Third and Fourth battalions linked up with the paratroopers. Together they covered the roads with a series of well-fortified positions. Castro's forces were not getting through.)

(However, there was minor panic—and a near-tragic mistake—on the road from San Blas to Yaguaramas when the 18 paratroopers assigned to hold an advanced po-

sition spotted a camouflaged machine gun aimed right at them. Nervously the tank fired—and promptly a shell came whistling back. An ugly little battle between members of the brigade was about to break out when one of Guerra's men recognized the friendly camouflaged hunting suits worn as battle dress by the infantry.) Guerra, relieved, welcomed his reinforcements; then paratroopers, infantry and tank turned on the *milicianos* and drove them all the way back to Yaguaramas.

"They tried to break out all the rest of that afternoon," Guerra said. "They just kept coming down the road in waves—the way the Chinese did in Korea. They were easy targets."

At Pepe San Román's headquarters and at infantry and paratrooper outposts on the roadways the men wondered when and where Castro's heavy weapons would hit them. The battle had now gone on for more than 14 hours and not a tank had rumbled in from Havana, about 120 miles away, or from any other direction. Instead, (Castro's

army moved into battle in lightly fortified convoys. One of the largest—a string of vans, buses, Jeeps and even a milk truck—brought some 900 young cadets of a military school down the road toward Playa Larga and into disaster.

When a Second Battalion staff officer learned of the size and make-up of the convoy, he radioed to two of the B-26s covering the beach and asked them to hit the convoy just as it reached the battalion roadblock. The brigade planes flew over the long motor column and dipped their wings, as if in salute. The cadets waved and cheered. Then the bombers turned back and made their run.

"It was awful," says Pedro Perraspa, who was firing at the convoy from the roadblock. "First I saw a lot of caps flying through the air; then there were men screaming and running, and gasoline tanks blowing up. I heard later we killed about half the battalion of cadets. You could smell the burning flesh right away."

After the carnage, the buzzards came out of the nearby swamps. They were to remain part of the scene—circling endlessly in the sky—for the rest of the battle.)

MONDAY NIGHT

Soon after the sun went down both ends of the front were rocked by artillery, tank and small-weapon fire. At Playa Larga staff officer José Dearing of the Second Battalion put in a call to brigade headquarters in Girón requesting more men, more ammunition and another tank. His request was met—except that the brigade could not give him all the ammunition he felt he would need. Mortar and artillery pieces that had been wheeled into position by Castro's forces during the afternoon started to pound the battalion area. The men might have taken heavy punishment if it had not been for the ease with which they confused Castro's gun crews. By listening to the enemy's firing orders on their radios they were able to tell what was coming and when. They even supplied Castro's gunners with their own fictitious target readings.

"It was easy to louse them up," said one of the brigade's radio operators. "Whenever we heard Fidel's mortar commander asking for the range and firing angle, we'd cut

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INVASION

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in and tell him—"Compañero, up 15 and 10 to the right." The barrage would miss us completely, and the fool would shout into his radio, "You are nothing but a damned idiot, compañero! Try it again!" So we told him, "Up 25, right 15." It went like that until they finally caught on, but it helped give us time to get set and dig in. They were so confused they never did do us much damage."

When the visibility in the mist and darkness was at its worst, the first two enemy tanks came down the road toward Playa Larga, blinking their lights off and on as they tried to find the way into the brigade's position. Because the shoulders of the road were soft, the tanks had to come single file. The brigade's bazookas knocked them out—one, two—and the road was temporarily blocked. But it was not long before other Castro tanks pushed their way past the wrecks.

For the rest of the night the men of the Second were under severe pressure as they tried to hold their defensive positions at a traffic circle on the outskirts of Playa Larga. (Every now and then an enemy tank would come lumbering into the circle, rolling steel treads over its own wounded and over the weapons dropped by brigade soldiers as they dashed out of the way.)

Low on ammunition, short of firepower, the brigade held the circle only because of the individual courage of its men. *Barberito*, the daring little barber who had fought so well at the roadblock earlier, raced close to a Stalin tank and then ran around it, slamming shells at all sides with his recoilless rifle. The shells did not penetrate the armor, but the sound they made frightened the crew members so badly that they crawled out with their hands up in surrender. The tank lieutenant asked to meet that "crazy little bastard who kept going in circles around us." It was too late, however, for introductions. *Barberito* was dead, the victim of a machine gun from another Castro tank.

The brigade's tank which had come from Girón to support the Second had had such a busy evening that its ammunition ran out before midnight. The tank driver, José ("Little Egg") Alvarez, scored a hit on a Stalin tank with his last shell only to face another one coming up an embankment onto the road. "The Egg" accelerated his machine and crashed into the



enemy before it could fire at him. "We kept butting into each other like a couple of prehistoric monsters," said Alvarez. "He tried to turn his gun toward me, but I wouldn't let him. I rammed him again and he butted me so hard he split his gun barrel."

(In addition to the horrors of shell and rifle fire and the dank darkness, the exhausted men at the traffic circle above Playa Larga had to put up with an invasion of land crabs that crawled all over them. Mosquitoes, too, came in thick, stinging clouds. They were living and dying in a nightmare.) But they held.

The strangeness and terror of the long night invaded the three dimly lit rooms of the small house in Playa Larga which served as the Second Battalion's communications headquarters. The battalion's prisoners were huddled in one room; the radios crackled in another; a third, hastily arranged

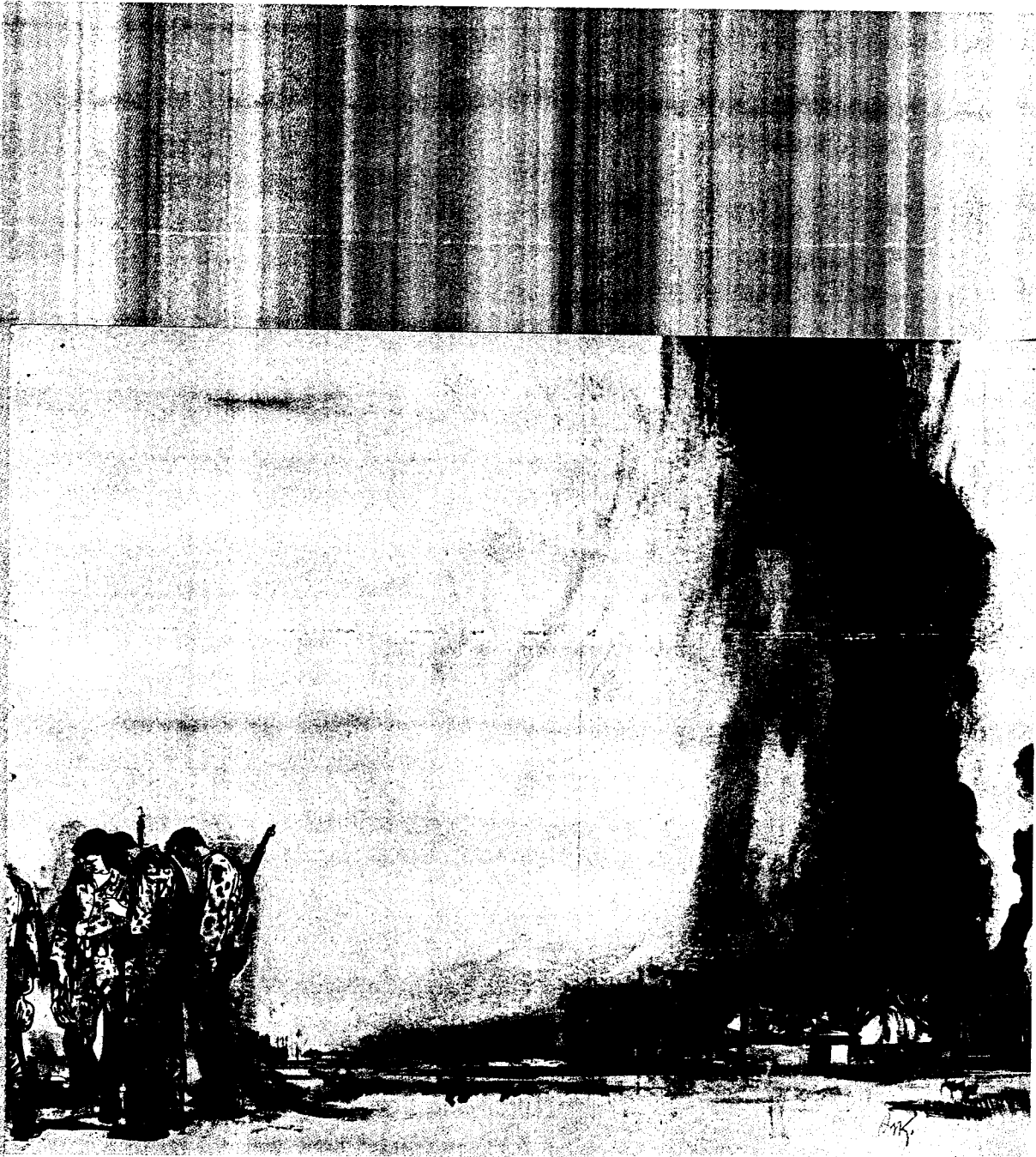
as an infirmary, held a mortally wounded brigade soldier.

"He was breathing out blood and dying," a radio operator said, "and I could still hear him when I went into the radio room next door. It sounded the way it does when you blow under water. I went in to comfort him and he asked for a gun. He said, 'I want to kill myself before they get me.' I refused him the gun. Then he asked me to kill him and put him out of his misery. I was going to do it for him, but I could not. I had no right to take his life. So I went outside where the noises and flashes of the battle were like a giant hammer and chisel making sparks on the dark earth."

At the San Blas front the brigade's situation grew worse as the night wore on. On the road leading north out of San Blas toward Codovonga, at the advance positions,

the enemy launched so many attacks that there, too, the brigade's ammunition was running dangerously low. Rifleman Adolfo Padrón of the Fourth Battalion took a quick inventory: one box of 30-caliber machine-gun ammunition, two or three shells for the 57-mm rifle, five bazooka rounds. The 75-mm rifle had been fired so steadily that the barrel began to melt. When a runner reported the predicament of the forward position to battalion headquarters, Company Commander José Miguel Battle took a truck up the road to retrieve the beleaguered men and drive them back to San Blas.

The position on the Yaguaramas road also became untenable during the night. After hours of pounding from Castro artillery, Paratrooper José Guerra and his companions, equipped only with small arms and mortars after their tank was recalled, were ordered back into San Blas.



Buzzards Haunt a Burial As Despair Deepens

On the dark beach where the invasion had begun the night before a small group of officers stood together and talked hopefully about the return of the transports. Without the ammunition and supplies from the ships the brigade's position would soon be hopeless. Frogman Alonso was so sure they would return in the darkness that he went out in a boat to look for them so that he could guide them in. But there were no ships.)

Tuesday, April 18—MORNING
Shortly before 8 o'clock on the second day of the fighting, Commander Erneido Oliva called the officers of the Second Battalion together on the beach at Playa Larga and reviewed the deteriorating situation. His men were almost out of ammunition—some were down

to their last pistol shots; the *milicianos* had begun to infiltrate through the brush into his position; and enemy sniper fire was sharply increasing on his right flank. Oliva decided to abandon Playa Larga and retreat along the coastal road to Girón. A small burial party dug graves for their dead comrades. Then the Second Battalion scrambled into a few captured Czech-made trucks and pulled out.

The retreat was orderly. There were still a few mortar rounds left, so the mortar squad stayed on the beach until the last, providing cover for the withdrawal. Pedro Porras almost missed the convoy because he had been searching the empty houses for something to eat. He jumped on one of the last trucks with his loot; two chocolate-covered cookies.)

(While buzzards circle overhead and the fires of an all-night battle still smolder on the outskirts of Playa Larga, men of the brigade gather on Tuesday morning around a tree to bury their dead.

A few minutes later, with the battle for Playa Larga lost, the men will begin their retreat along the beach to Girón. They have fought without rest or food for nearly 30 hours, and have run out of ammunition.)

With Playa Larga abandoned the only fighting on the beachhead was in the San Blas area. The town was under such heavy fire from Castro's artillery that the paratroopers and infantry of the Third and Fourth Battalions made a practice of pulling out from time to time in order to reduce their casualties. The *milicianos* did not seem to realize that they were shelling an empty town.

"We'd reoccupy San Blas every time we got real thirsty," said a paratrooper, "because it had the only well in the whole area."

TUESDAY AFTERNOON

The news the brigade had been waiting to hear came with dramatic timing and spread swiftly across the beachhead from Girón to San Blas: the U.S. was going to send its jets into the action. First to get the electrifying report was the B-26 command at Happy Valley. The message from the brigade's advisers came over the teletype.

"I read it after it was decoded."

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said Pilot Gonzalo Herrera. "It said that the jet cover we'd been requesting would be granted. The jets would be waiting at 10,000 feet. All we had to do, if we needed help, was give the usual signal: 'Mad Dog 4, May Day!'"

On the porch of the unfinished beach house at Girón where the brigade's communications center was set up, Radio Operator Orlando Cuervo also got the word. Cuervo, who had once been Castro's Undersecretary of Commerce, said, "We kept asking for air cover and they kept saying it was coming. Then on Tuesday they said it was coming for sure."

At Girón headquarters, Douglas Nelson Lethbridge, a Cuban patriot who had been a member of the Royal Canadian Air Force, was in charge of the captured airfield. He listened as unidentified advisers reported that air cover would reach the brigade in 15 minutes.

"You told us that two hours ago," brigade commented.

"Do you want to give up?" came the message.

"What the hell," the man at brigade said, "all we're asking for is what you promised us."

At exactly 3:30 p.m. all the reports and promises about U.S. air support appeared finally to have brought glorious action. High in the clear sky above San Blas, three U.S. Navy jet aircraft with swept-back wings flew in tight formation. The planes dipped their wings in greeting at the cheering troops below and then headed north toward Júcuma and Covadonga, where Castro was gathering his forces for a final push against San Blas. The men of the brigade were sure the turning point had come. They waited for the sounds of strafing or the thump of bombs to drift back from enemy territory. But the planes passed over them once more, this time heading out to sea.

"Watch for them," someone shouted, "they'll be back."

TUESDAY NIGHT

The men at San Blas settled down to another siege of heavy shelling from artillery they could not hope to reach with their own mortars and small arms. At Girón the officers now realized that the brigade could not hold out another day without relief from their own ships—or U.S. planes. Just off the road leading into the resort town from Playa Larga the *militianos* slipped through the brush, for the first time threaten-

ing the headquarters area itself.

The airport at Girón, virtually useless without the equipment aboard the vanished transports, was the scene of unusual activity in the night. A C-46 made a landing to pick up a wounded pilot and leave some supplies and ammunition. An air drop over the field brought more ammunition. But the ammunition clips were for Springfield rifles—not for the M-1s the brigade carried—and the men had to search for empty M-1 clips and laboriously reload them with the new bullets.)

Wednesday, April 19

With the first light of dawn, on the last day of the invasion, the defenders at San Blas watched a B-26 with blue markings on its wings fly low over town and head in the direction of Covadonga. The plane suddenly dropped its two wing tanks and a huge ball of red flame shot up from the ground. The napalm strike set fire to the brush and sent Castro soldiers screaming from their positions. The napalm bombs had landed on a concentration of *militianos* preparing a major assault on San Blas.)

The pilots of the brigade fought a lonely, wearying battle against the same lengthening odds faced by the ground troops. They were often outnumbered and always outmaneuvered by Castro's fighters, who could easily shoot them down by getting on their tails. The fliers were exhausted—and their ranks depleted—by the marathon missions from Nicaragua to Cuba which began on Saturday, two days before the invasion. On that strike Castro's air bases at San Antonio, Libertad and Santiago de Cuba were bombed and strafed at the cost of a single B-26. But many strategic targets were untouched because orders from the top canceled all other pre-invasion raids—much to the dismay of the fliers at Happy Valley. After the brigade debarked on Monday morning the pilots flew in steady rotation over the beaches, trying to protect the men and ships. Two B-26s were lost. That night another bombing raid was attempted but when the small formation of B-26s arrived over Cuba their assigned targets were hidden by a low-hanging fog. In Tuesday's decisive air battles Castro's fighters shot down three more B-26s—leaving only seven planes, most of which were too damaged to be of any use.)

The brigade's final air mission (which included the Wednesday napalm strike witnessed by the ground troops at San Blas) was conducted by four American pilots

in two planes, voluntarily substituting for the battle-weary Cubans, and by Gonzalo Herrera, flying his B-26 alone. The Americans were assigned to hit the build-up of Castro troops outside San Blas; Herrera was to strafe and bomb artillery positions.

After his four-hour flight over the water, Herrera went into his bomb run at 800 feet, dropped his load on the Castro gun positions near Girón and then skimmed out across the swamp in an attempt to avoid an attack by fighter planes and the anti-aircraft shells that were peppering the sky around

He decided to empty his rockets and machine guns on a town full of trucks and anti-aircraft guns. The nose of his plane was hit on this run and smoke filled the cockpit, but the plane stayed on course.

Then he heard another B-26 calling: "T-33 attacking! Where are you? I need cover. Mad Dog 4, May Day. Where are you? I'm falling into the..."

Herrera turned his plane and headed on a south-by-southwest course back toward Happy Valley.

"I was getting so groggy," he said, "I almost piled into a wave. Then I took my last Benzdrine



him. He did not escape unscathed.

"I could tell I'd been hit because one propeller began to vibrate," said Herrera, "and I was losing oil pressure in the right engine. Then I could hear the American pilots calling out the distress signal. 'Mad Dog 4!' they called. 'May Day! May Day! T-33 attacking us!' (One of the pilots begged for help from the American aircraft carrier which was lying off to the south of us. 'We are Americans,' he said, 'help us!')

"This time the carrier answered—she had not replied to any of the other calls—and the voice said, 'I am a naval officer and I must obey my orders.' I turned, almost scraping the water with my wing, and climbed up to 1,000 feet to check my engines. I saw some trucks rolling down a highway and divided on them with my machine guns going. (Then I heard another May Day call from one of the Americans. But his transmission was interrupted by an explosion. I turned and saw a ball of flame in the air about a mile to my right.)"

Herrera looked around for the Castro jet that was causing all the trouble, but he could not find it.

pill. I was not sure I could make it all the way home, so I tried to raise the carrier on the radio. I thought I might have to ditch in the water and I wanted to land where she was. But I got no answer. They weren't taking any more calls."

Herrera finally made it back to the base in Nicaragua, flying low over the waves all the way. As soon as he taxied to a halt, one of the American advisers at the field climbed onto his wing and fired questions at him.

"They were still planning another sortie for later in the day," Herrera remembered. "But after they heard my report and got a good look at my plane—it had 37 holes in it—they canceled all the other flights. That was our last bombing mission."

In a grove of sea grape trees on the western outskirts of Girón the brigade made its last-day effort to hold the beach town. A line of Castro tanks approached on the road from Playa Larga and a half-dozen brigade bazooka teams went darting through the sea grape trees in an attempt to stop them. They

were supported by "The Egg" Alvarez and his tank.

"The trees were good cover for us," said Felipe Rivero Diaz, one of the bazooka men. "And our camouflage suits were wonderful. They blended right in with the foliage. The enemy could hardly see us." (The camouflage suits, manufactured in the U.S., were designed for duck hunting; some of the collar labels on the shirts read "Happy Hunting.")

The first Castro tank to come within shooting range of the roadblock was a Soviet-made SU-85. The brigade's tankers stopped it

out the fire with the tank's automatic fire extinguisher. When he jumped to the ground, the mortar men were shocked at the sight of him. The blood from his ear had soaked his shirt, and the fire inside the tank had singed him in several places.

"Little Egg!" one man cried. "They've killed you!" And The Egg had to explain that he was only a bit damaged.

At his headquarters, now under shell fire, Pepe San Román was on the radio telling his advisers that

where," he said. "We need your jets!"

As the fighting went on that morning at San Blas it would have been hard at times to identify the winning or losing sides. Forward observer Antonio Zamora of the Third Battalion crept toward the enemy lines to try to spot targets for the brigade's mortar men and found Castro's troops in a state of demoralization.

"They were scared and fed up with the war," he said, "and they talked about surrendering. We could have captured them all if we'd had more ammunition. But

fell back in panic, dropping their weapons and ripping off their shirts to make flags of surrender.

"We had no orders to take it easy on them," said Adolfo Padrón of the Fourth Battalion, "so we kept right on firing at them until the order came to pull out and begin the retreat toward Girón. I was very depressed when the order came. We really had them on the run."

Slowly now the battle came to its inevitable ending. The positions in the sea grape trees outside Girón became untenable when Castro's soldiers began to turn the brigade's



A Big Surprise—the Enemy Tries to Quit

cold. A Stalin tank followed and was knocked out too. Then a Russian-made armored car made a run for it. It was hit also.

"This sort of blocked up the road," said The Egg. "Then we saw one of Castro's U.S. Sherman tanks. He was a sneaky one. He hid behind the other tanks we'd knocked out and got off a shot that killed Elio Alemán, one of our tank commanders."

The shot fatal to Alemán sent pieces of metal flying through the air, one of which sliced off the top of The Egg's right ear.

Alemán's tank was afire and Erneido Oliva, the brigade's deputy commander, was shouting for someone to move it away before it blew up. The Egg jumped out of his own tank and into Alemán's and drove it up the road.

"I didn't know where to park it," he said, "so I stopped next to our mortar squad. They didn't want it. 'You damned nut,' they screamed, 'get that thing away from us before it blows us all up!'"

Alvarez finally was able to put

there was only one hope left—to unleash the U.S. Navy and bail out the brigade. This time, instead of the usual negative answer, Pepe got encouragement. If he would give them a detailed list of the targets he wanted hit, including their precise nature and locations and an order of priority, they would see what they could do. Pepe's staff prepared the necessary information and put it on the air. After a lengthy delay the reply finally came.

"I was nearby when Pepe got the answer," said a brigade radio operator, "and overheard part of the radio exchange. 'Sorry, Pepe,' the man at the other end said, 'but you have done your best. You have fought well. Disperse. Good luck. Don't call me any more.'"

"I remember Pepe's reply," the radio operator said. "Some of his conversation with the voice had been in English and I'm not sure I understood all of it. But his last words were in Spanish, and they spoke for all of us. 'We don't need your compliments, you son of a

Before retreating from San Blas, the brigade (foreground) launches a final attack with tanks against Castro's *milicianos* to give

its wounded time to get out. As the men advance, they are startled to see Castro's troops waving white flags and trying to surrender.

we had only a handful of rounds."

There was precious little ammunition anywhere in the brigade at San Blas; the radios were no longer working, so there was no way to communicate with headquarters at Girón. Paratroop Commander (Alejandro del Valle gave the order to retreat.) But first he called for one last assault to make the enemy pull back and give the brigade time to pick up its wounded.

The final attack by paratroopers and remnants of the Third and Fourth Battalions exposed an incredible weakness in Castro's forces—and indicated how little in support or supplies it might have taken to turn the battle around. The brigade pushed its way through San Blas and nearly to the original roadblock beyond. The *milicianos*

flank by swinging wide and scrambling through the surf and across the beach.

Before Oliva pulled his men back into Girón he went up to The Egg, standing bloody and dirty beside his tank. He gravely saluted the young enlisted man and said, "Captain, I leave you alone. Good luck." It was the only battlefield promotion of the invasion.

But The Egg's thoughts were on his tank. He carefully booby-trapped it, then went to the beach with his valuable telescopic sight and fired enough bullets through it to ruin it. Satisfied that the enemy would have trouble ever using his tank, The Egg walked back to Girón.

The town was now abandoned

CONTINUED

INVASION

CONTINUED

—and so was the brigade's headquarters in the clubhouse. Pepe San Román had left a message for any of the brigade who might show up there: "Sálvese quien pueda (Every man for himself)."

Most of the men took the advice literally and struck out, either in small groups or alone, in attempts to avoid capture. They were certain that capture meant death. (One large group, under Oliva's leadership, tried to organize for a march into the mountains, where the men hoped to operate as guerrillas.) (Those who headed for the mountains or swamps were soon forced to eat grass and lizards and lick the dew off leaves in the morning in their efforts to stay alive.) But many in the brigade decided their best chance to survive was to get off the island entirely. They headed for the open sea.

"I could see a couple of destroyers cruising back and forth on the horizon," said Antonio Zamora, "so I stripped off my clothes and swam into the surf until I found a little boat bobbing around with no one in it. But the destroyers pulled away before I could get close to them.

"I drifted around for four days. The only thing I had to eat was a fish that jumped into the boat with me. Finally the current took me to the Isle of Pines, of all places, where Castro has a big prison camp. I was captured there."

The Egg, with a group of six comrades, made it out to sea in a small fishing boat stocked with a pound of rice and a case of warm beer. But after drifting around for several days they landed on a Cuban beach where waiting *milicianos* stuck bayonets into their ribs and marched them off to prison.

(Another boatload—22 in number when they started out—drifted for 15 days in the sweltering gulf heat. Only seven survived the ordeal of thirst, hunger and exposure and were rescued by an American freighter.)

The most astonishing rescue story was told by some of the 30 brigade members who were fortunate enough to be picked up by the U.S. destroyers before they sailed away.

"Our little fishing boat had

washed up on a deserted beach," one of them said. "We did not know where we were and were so sick from thirst and exposure that we didn't really care. Then we spotted planes of the U.S. Navy, apparently out looking for survivors. They disappeared and pretty soon we saw a destroyer heading up the coast. We started signaling like mad with the few strips of shirt we still had on our backs. The ship sent out a rubber boat with some Cuban boys in it and they took us out to the destroyer. It was the U.S.S. *Eaton*.

"I was too sick at first to know what was going on, but we were called into the commanding officer's quarters to answer some questions. We told the captain all we knew and then he made a speech saying, 'We have lost a battle, but we have not lost the war.' I noticed that he had some aerial photographs of the Bay of Pigs area in his quarters.

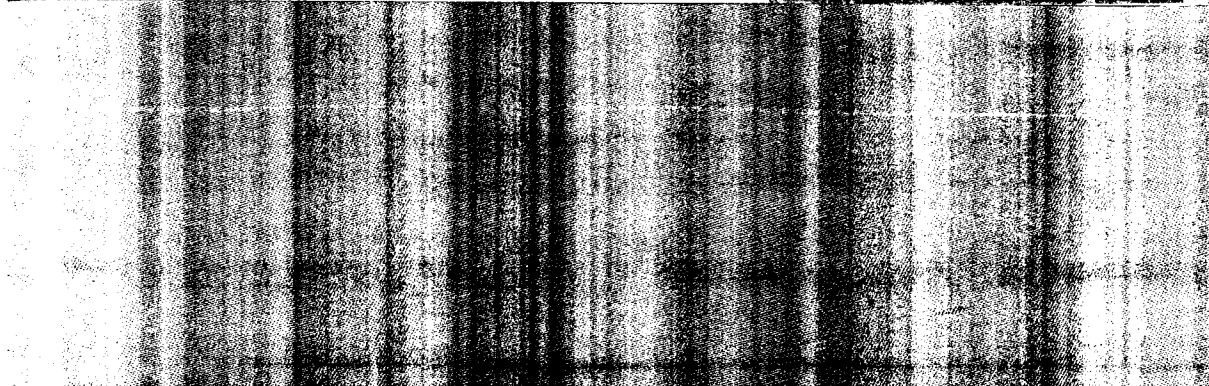
"A few days later they put us in a landing craft and sent us over



There Is No Escaping

With organized resistance near an end, the enemy begins the mopping up. Above, a jet strafes hungry brigade survivors who were preparing to barbecue pigs. At right, defeated soldiers launch a makeshift sailboat while shells fall around them. The boat later drifted onto another Cuban beach and the fugitives were captured.

CONTINUED





Kossin

to a big U.S. Navy transport. It was full of U.S. Marines—about a thousand of them. The Marines tried to be extra nice—as if they felt guilty about something. If we asked them for a cigaret, they gave us a whole pack; if we asked for a match, we were given a lighter. [Some of them told us they had been sent off on a 'mission.' They were not sure exactly what it was themselves. But they had been near the Bay of Pigs—they had seen and heard the fighting from a distance. They gave us the impression that they had expected to see action on this mission, and they were still pretty excited about it. After one night and one morning of watching and hearing the battle, they were ordered to pull out of the area. They seemed pretty concerned about how everything turned out.”

The fate of most of the men of the brigade who stayed on the island is well known. Very few succeeded in avoiding capture by Cas-

tro's *milicianos*. But there were those who never made it to the prison compounds.

At Girón, 135 of the prisoners were led to a refrigeration truck and ordered to pile in, one man atop the other, until the truck

was packed with bodies. Then the heavy doors to the sealed and insulated cargo space were locked shut. The trip to Havana lasted eight hours. When the doors of the truck were unbolted, 10 of the men were dead.

The Last Try Fails

Maintaining discipline to the end, a few survivors organize a tactical formation and head with their tanks for the Escambray mountains, 60 miles away, where they hope to fight on as guerrillas. But Castro's planes came over on a strafing mission a few minutes later and the men scattered. Some of them still tried to head for the mountains; others split up and tried to hide out in the swamps. Most were eventually captured.

FOR WASHINGTON REACTION

TURN TO PAGE 30

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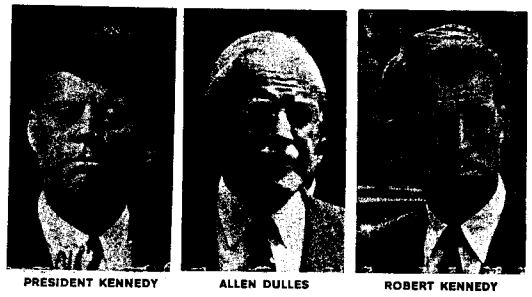
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Anatomy of

by **TOM FLAHERTY**

The Bay of Pigs fiasco came hard on the heels of Russia's successful orbiting of Yuri Gagarin, the first man into space, an accomplishment which preceded it by only five days. The two events combined to bring low the morale of the fledgling Kennedy administration—and of the nation. Recovery was not really complete until 18 months later, when the U.S. successfully handled the urgent crisis posed by Soviet missile installations in Cuba.

It fell to the Administration, when only three months old, to assess the damage and pick up the pieces. Commenting at the time on the widespread criticism directed against the U.S. government, President Kennedy remembered a quotation: "Victory has a hundred fathers, and defeat is an orphan." As commander-in-chief, President Kennedy had only one honorable course open to him: he adopted the orphan.

The President appointed a committee to investigate the Central Intelligence Agency and its role in the disaster. It was composed of General Maxwell Taylor, who later became Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; Allen Dulles, then director of the CIA, which had planned and supervised the invasion; Admiral Arleigh Burke, then Chief of Naval Operations; and Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the President's brother.

[This committee's report never has been published and, except for two interviews given by the Attorney General last January, no member of the panel ever has spoken publicly on the subject.]

But last week word circulated that the men who fought the battle were unfolding their stories to LIFE. The officials who planned

and controlled the over-all operation rummaged through painful memories to answer the questions and the charges that spontaneously evolve from the accounts given by the survivors of Brigade 2506. Their views, often in conflict with one another's and with those of the brigade, nonetheless represent deep personal conviction.

Tactical Plan

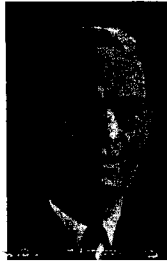
The President himself is known to believe that the operation fundered as a consequence of many grievous miscalculations. The most serious ones: *underestimating the number of troops required for the invasion force; overestimating the ability of the brigade's own B-26s to provide air cover and support; erroneously assuming that the landing would be the catalyst for a popular uprising; erroneously assuming that, even if the landing somehow failed, the troops could go into the hills and wage effective guerrilla warfare, as Castro himself had once*

Exulting in victory, Castro stands on Girón airfield and points cigar at B-26 with Cuban





MAXWELL TAYLOR



ARLEIGH BURKE

Principal figures at Washington end of Bay of Pigs controversy were President Kennedy and committee he appointed in April 1961 to investigate the defeat. Their findings have never been made public.

the Snafu

done, until popular support could build up behind them.

In the White House view, these errors were inherent in the plan for the operation. The Administration's assessment of its own responsibility, then, is that the President listened to bad advice and failed to spot the fatal errors in advance.

Pentagon and intelligence officials who were prominently involved in the operation disagree with the Administration. They still believe the plan could have succeeded if it had been carried out as intended. They argue that:

The original plan, which they gave a good chance of success, called for a landing 100 miles east of the Bay of Pigs, near the town of Trinidad. It was a more desirable beachhead from a military point of view, but there would have been risk to the many civilians nearby. When the Administration ordered the landing site changed, the planners chose the less populated Bay of Pigs area, where the

markings which belonged to brigade. It was shot down by U.S.-built B-26 owned by Castro.



prospects of success were diminished but still remained reasonably high.

The tactical plan called for three air strikes on successive days by the Cuban-manned B-26s. Their most important assignment was to wipe out Castro's small air force on the ground before the invasion began. President Kennedy ordered U.S. advisers to reduce the number to two air strikes—and eventually to one (see below). Castro, therefore, had enough planes left to control the air over the beachhead.

When word reached Washington of the deteriorating situation at the Bay of Pigs, the planners repeatedly asked the President to unleash the U.S. forces that were standing offshore: carrier-based jet planes, Navy gunfire, combat Marines. He refused. (It is conceded that his decision was consistent with his pre-invasion stipulation that no U.S. forces were to take part in the fighting.) Finally, he did agree to let the Navy fly reconnaissance over the beachhead and take photographs. It was these planes that the embattled brigade cheered in vain when they passed overhead.

It was never intended that 1,400 men should try to free Cuba. They were expected only to seize and hold a beachhead. This beachhead would be the focus for support by tens of thousands of sympathizers and volunteers already in Cuba.

Air Cover


On this major point the White House, the Pentagon and the CIA are agreed: at no time did the government promise support by U.S. forces of any kind. This stance was made amply clear to the Cuban exile leaders and to the officers of the brigade. Just one week before the invasion the President dispatched a CIA official to Guatemala for the specific purpose of

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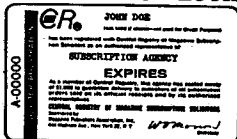


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INVASION
CONTINUED

emphasizing to the brigade leaders that they would get no U.S. air support. At his news conference five days before the invasion, Kennedy said, "There will not, under any circumstances, be an intervention in Cuba by U.S. armed forces." In view of this record, the President insists that Brigade 2506, while it was defeated, was not betrayed.

Yet the men of the brigade were told, "The air will be ours." Washington's interpretation: it was indeed expected that the brigade's own B-26s would control the air; it may be that the Cubans misunderstood or refused to believe that U.S. jets would not be sent to help them; or perhaps their advisers in the field made promises without authorization.

The first pre-invasion air strike, on Saturday morning, April 15, was only partly successful at best. It can be argued that this early strike did more harm than good. (The U.S. put out a cover story, through exile chief Miró Cardona, that the bombing had been done by Castro's own pilots as a last gesture before defecting to the U.S.) But that same Saturday afternoon Castro's delegate, Raúl Roa, accurately denounced the attack in the United Nations as a prelude to invasion. Nervous neutrals and Latin American delegates began to ask questions. Faced by diplomatic pressure, some of it from his own advisers, President Kennedy on Sunday ordered cancellation of the air strike by the brigade's B-26s which was scheduled to coincide with and support the Monday landing.)

(Meanwhile, Castro—forewarned by the pre-invasion bombing on Saturday—arrested some 100,000 Cubans who might have joined the invaders, jamming them into theaters and sports arenas after his jails were filled to overflowing. This nullified the chance of a general uprising even before the first brigade members started ashore.)

(The brigade claims that on Tuesday word was received that air cover definitely was on its way. Officials answer: no Washington source authorized such a message.)

Coral Reefs

"They told us there were no reefs in the landing area," the Cubans charge.

"We knew reefs were there," answers a government spokesman. "The invasion force had adequate current information from the latest hydrographic charts and from high-altitude aerial photographs. They knew about the reefs; but the landing consumed more time than was expected. In order to get the forces ashore before nautical twilight ended at dawn and their presence was revealed, the ship commanders on the scene diverted certain landing craft to more direct routes. These routes involved hazards of heavy coral. Some landing craft were hung up on the reefs."

Another source adds: "The channels through the coral had

And the Victor Still



been identified. The invaders must have missed the gaps in the reefs in the dark."

(Why did the plan call for a landing at night when the history of World War II shows that most successful amphibious landings have taken place at dawn?) (The planners rebut that the element of surprise, which they trusted covering darkness would provide, was an overriding consideration in the particular Bay of Pigs landing.)

The Marines

No Washington source denies the presence offshore of combat-ready U.S. Marines in at least battalion force—though it is questioned whether they were close enough to do more than imagine the sights and sounds of battle. A Pentagon official points out that there always is a fairly steady traffic of Marines afloat in the Caribbean and, given knowledge that the invasion was to take place, the fleet commander would—if he were on his toes—keep his force within sprinting distance of where the action was going to be. In this instance, an Administration official adds, the Marines were ordered into the Bay of Pigs area "to respond to any contingency that might arise."

The Marine commandant, General David Shoup, says, "To my knowledge there never was any plan for the Marines to assist in the invasion at the Bay of Pigs, any more than there is a plan today to land Marines in Haiti, or the Dominican Republic or Laos."

Training

(Washington denies the brigade included many green troops. Except for a relative handful of volunteers who signed on at almost the last minute, officials say, the brigade had excellent training. Many were already experienced soldiers and airmen. In some phases, like marksmanship, the men of the brigade had more training over a comparable period of time than their counterparts in the U.S. armed forces.)

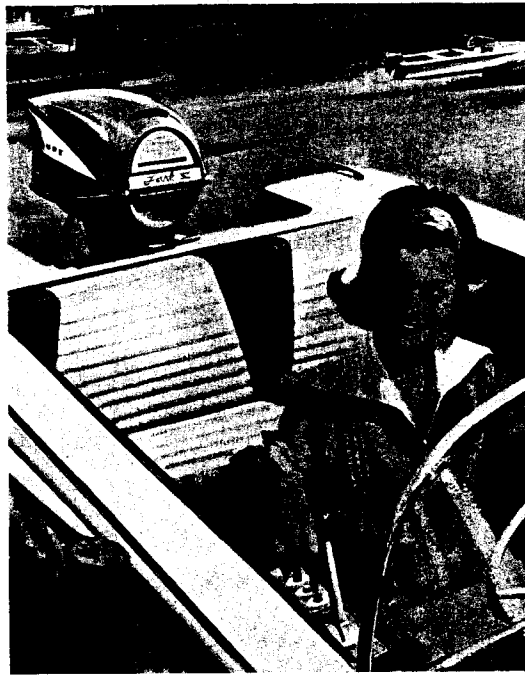
Supply Ships

The vessels still afloat after Castro's air attacks on the first day of battle turned tail for the open sea to avoid being sunk. Scattered and disorganized, according to one official, the ships—private vessels manned by crews of several nationalities—had to be rounded up and herded back toward the bay by U.S. destroyers. Before the freighters could get back, the battle was over.

It has been argued, it is being argued, it will be argued for years to come that there is at least a part of truth in the differing points of view of all who played a part in the debacle of the Bay of Pigs. But (the largest and most important truth springs from two indisputable facts. The men of Brigade 2506) believed, until the end, that the U.S. would not let their invasion fail. They were wrong.)

In Moscow's Red Square last week, Castro donned a Soviet headpiece as he appeared at a lavish rally in his honor.

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