

Kennedy Papers: Insight on Bay of Pigs, Dallas '63

Part 8/2/71

Castro Detailed Invasion Flop

By Murray Seeger
Los Angeles Times

WALTHAM, Mass., Aug. 1—Two years after the American-sponsored invasion of Cuba, Fidel Castro took two American lawyers to the Bay of Pigs site and demonstrated why it had failed so disastrously.

It was April 1963, just days short of the second anniversary of the invasion which John F. Kennedy later acknowledged was one of the great mistakes of his presidency, and Castro was playing host to James B. Donovan and John E. Nolan Jr., as he had several times in the previous five months.

"He'd get out of the car and describe different aspects of the battle; where he was when he got such and such a message from the troops and what he did, and so on," Nolan recalled in a recorded interview made for the John F. Kennedy Library located in temporary quarters in this Boston suburb.

This interview, recorded



FIDEL CASTRO ... explained debacle

in April 1967 by Nolan in Washington, is just one of the many revealing new pieces of history now available to researchers at the library.

Effective Monday, the Kennedy Library is making available 95 per cent of the 3.3 million documents it has relating to the Kennedy administration. A small, initial portion of the documents was opened to the public in October, 1969.

See KENNEDY, A13, Col. 4

RFK Opposed Appointed Judge

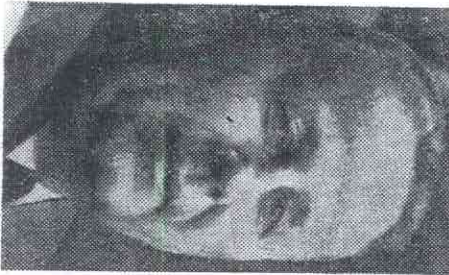
By Jack Nelson
Los Angeles Times

WALTHAM, Mass., Aug. 1 As Attorney General, Robert F. Kennedy sought American Bar Association action against the first federal judge his brother appointed—U.S. District Judge William Harold Cox of Jackson, Miss., who had written a letter about "lousy" civil rights cases to a justice Department attorney.

Letters and memoranda disclosing a running feud between the Kennedy administration and Judge Cox, who still presides over many civil rights matters in Mississippi, are among the Burke Marshall papers opened to researchers by the John F. Kennedy Library here Monday.

The papers of Marshall, former assistant attorney general in charge of the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, also reflect frequent frustrations in the Kennedy administration in dealing with several of the federal judges in the South on civil rights cases.

None of the judges was



JUDGE HAROLD COX ... problem for RFK

considered more hostile to government civil rights cases than Cox. His brusque manner with government attorneys, his courtroom comments about "niggers" and his charges that the Kennedy administration was playing politics with civil rights not only embarrassed the administration and impeded its efforts to enforce civil rights laws, but hurt its behind-the-scenes effort to promote voluntary compliance.

See JUDGE, A13, Col. 2

JFK Was Told Of Texas Peril

By Jules Witcover
Los Angeles Times

WALTHAM, Mass., Aug. 1—Warnings from Texas of political and personal peril to President John F. Kennedy in advance of the November, 1963, trip that ended in his assassination are among White House files of the Kennedy presidential years.

The files, indicate Kennedy, as early as June, 1963, was considering a trip to Texas. State Democrats at the time were embroiled in an intra-party feud between Gov. John B. Connally, a close ally of Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, and Sen. Ralph Yarborough, a bitter Johnson foe.

On June 5, 1963, Kenneth O'Donnell, special assistant to the President, wrote a letter to Byron Skelton, the Democratic national committee man from Texas, saying the President was "hopeful he can work out a trip to Texas later on and we are working on this with the Vice President."

See TEXAS, A13, Col. 4

Castro Explained Flop to 2 Americans

KENNEDY, From A1

The Nolan interview is especially interesting for its descriptions of Castro with whom he and Donovan negotiated for the release of the 1,100 survivors of the disastrous invasion and 23 other American prisoners. Added to other recorded memories of such participants in the prisoner deal as retired Gen. Lucius D. Clay and the late Richard Cardinal Cushing, the interview supplies details not previously known of the negotiations with Castro.

Wouldn't Square

Speaking of the mercurial Cuban leader, Nolan said, "Many of the impressions that we had, and I think

that my impressions were about the same as Jim's (Donovan), would not square with the commonly accepted image of Castro in the United States.

"During the time that we were with him, Castro was never irrational, never drunk, never dirty," Nolan recalled. "In his personal relationships with us and in connection with the negotiations, he was always reasonable, always easy to deal with. He was a talker of very significant proportions. I mean, he would come over at midnight or 1 o'clock in the morning and stay all night talking. But he wasn't a conversational hog. He'd ask questions, listen for viewpoints. He was easy to talk to, good conversationalist, hardsell guy, constantly plugging his programs, his government."

Donovan, a New York attorney who had previously negotiated the exchange of Soviet spy Col. Rudolf Abel for the American U-2 pilot held by Russia, Francis Gary Powers, died in May, 1970, and did not leave an interview at the library.

Nolan was enlisted to help Donovan in December, 1962, by Milan Mikovsky, one of



The Kennedy papers reveal that two years after the U.S.-sponsored invasion of Cuba, Premier Fidel Castro took two American

lawyers, John E. Nolan Jr., left, and James B. Donovan, to the Bay of Pigs and explained the reasons for its failure.

Associated Press

the Justice Department aides of Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. They were under orders to get the Cuban invaders back to the United States by Christmas Eve.

Donovan negotiated an agreement under which the United States would give Castro food and medicine worth \$53 million in exchange for the prisoners. In addition, Castro insisted on getting \$2.9 million in cash which had previously been offered by Cuban refugee organizations as payment for sick and wounded brigade members already released.

It was during a conversation that lasted until 1 a.m. in early April, 1963, that Castro announced he would take Nolan and Donovan to the Bay of Pigs. They left from Castro's beach home at Verdadera, on the north side of the island nation, at 5 the same morning and drove to the bay on the south shore.

Sampled Swamp

"At one point, there's an area there which is marshy land, swamps and there's only one road that runs across it to solid ground," Nolan recalled. Castro "got out, walked off the road and into the marsh to see how swampy it was.

"You really had a sense of history listening to someone like Castro describe something like the Bay of

Pigs. And then the feeling that in walking out into the marsh, which was considered impassable by him and also by the brigade, if he stepped in the wrong spot or something, that he might just disappear beneath the ooze and that would be the end of the whole problem.

"And he sank down and it was up to his boots, but he got back."

Castro and Donovan developed a warm relationship that enabled the hard-drinking, witty lawyer to joke with the dictator in a way that his associates could not, Nolan related.

Just before Christmas, 1962, when Castro came to Havana airport where the prisoners were waiting for the ransom goods to arrive, a flight of Cuban Mig fighters swooped so low over the field that the men on the field had to crouch down.

"Donovan was standing next to Castro, elbowed him and said, in his loud voice that was clearly audible to me and other people around, 'It's the invasion.'

"It seemed to me to be a very jocular remark to make. Castro laughed at it. And then it seemed to me that the other people around, who initially didn't think it was funny at all, looked at Castro and saw his reaction, and they laughed, too."

In the April meetings, held to clean up details of

freeing the 23 Americans, including three CIA agents. Donovan and Castro talked about improving relations between the United States and Cuba.

"I think Jim (Donovan) always had his eye on this as a possibility," Nolan said. "He felt that his maximum usefulness lay in the direction of providing that kind of alternative to American policy. And I think that Castro had a similar interest in Donovan . . ."

Nolan gave another example of Donovan's manner with the Cubans, describing a tense scene when the Americans were desperately trying to get \$2.9 million into a Havana bank before 3 p.m. Christmas eve, 1962.

"Look, Mr. Minister, if you want to be helpful in this regard, there's one thing you can do," Donovan told the cabinet official who was driving Nolan to the airport. "When you get out there and that big plane is waiting to take off for Miami, don't defect."

In his interview, Gen. Clay recalled that he was summoned to Robert Kennedy's office on the day before Christmas, 1962. "Almost before I knew, I signed a note for the \$2.9 million and we had arranged for its transfer through a Canadian bank to a Canadian bank in Cuba, and by 5 o'clock that afternoon, the Cubans had the draft and before the

end of the day all of the prisoners had been returned," said Clay, who was a senior partner in the New York banking firm, Lehmann Bros.

Cardinal Cushing, who raised \$1 million of the prisoner ransom, told his interviewer:

"I think that the hopeless invasion of the Bay of Pigs is looked upon by President Kennedy as the Achilles heel of his brief term as President.

Sad About It

"The President felt very, very sad about it all . . . It was the first time in my life I ever saw tears come into his eyes," the Cardinal said, recalling a discussion of the Cuban episode with Mr. Kennedy.

Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, in a 1967 interview with John Stewart, acting director of the library, also recalled talking about the Bay of Pigs with the President.

"This episode seared him," the justice said. "He power that these groups had, these various insidious influences of the CIA and the Pentagon, on civilian policy, and I think it raised in his own mind the spectre: Can Jack Kennedy, President of the United States, ever be strong enough to really rule these two powerful agencies? I think it had a profound effect—it shook him up."

RFK Sought ABA Action On Judge JFK Appointed

JUDGE, From A1

The Marshall papers disclose that Robert Kennedy was so disturbed by Cox's behavior that he referred the matter to the ABA for "appropriate" action. ABA officials expressed "serious concern," contacted Cox, and studied the judge's behavior for some time thereafter. But it never publicly censured him or took any other formal action.

The Marshall papers also include a wealth of historical data on the administration's private efforts to persuade southern civic, business and political leaders to work for voluntary compliance with the civil rights law. The efforts brought mixed results.

A singularly unsuccessful effort involved Charley Conerly, the University of Mississippi and New York Giants' football great. The Justice Department tried to persuade him to speak out against violence prior to the bloody riots at Ole Miss when James Meredith broke the color line in 1962. But Conerly never agreed to do so.

Another file, labeled "Stick it to Mississippi," includes a list of federal contracts and projects in Mississippi that at one time the administration was considering holding up in an effort to force Mississippi officials to cope with desegregation laws and decrees.

The feud between Judge Cox and the Justice Department reached a fever point after he wrote a letter on Oct. 16, 1963, to John Doar, Marshall's top assistant and subsequent successor as head of the Civil Rights Division. Cox assailed Doar for writing a letter to the court which said that a voting right case that had been in litigation since Aug. 23, 1962, was important and deserved the "immediate attention of the court."

Cox accused Doar of "impudence in reciting the chronology of the case be-

fore me with which I am completely familiar" and added, "if you need to build such transcripts for your bossman, you had better do that interoffice memoranda because I am not favorably impressed with you or your tactics . . . I spend most of my time fooling with lousy cases brought before me by your department in the civil rights field."

Robert Kennedy wrote Cox that he was "shocked by the language and tone" of the letter and that he was referring a copy of it to the ABA's standing committee on federal judiciary and to "the former members of the fifth circuit of this committee because they were responsible for investigating and reporting to me on the qualifications of all potential judicial appointments."

Cox was the first judge appointed by President Kennedy under the 1961 expansion of the federal judiciary. Kennedy was less than enthusiastic about Cox, but appointed him in a "go-along" gesture to Sen. James O. Eastland (D-Miss.) who as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee could delay or possibly block other judiciary appointments.

Cox, who is still controversial, angered civil rights leaders almost from the time he took office. However, Robert Kennedy at first expressed hope that the judge would "do his duty."

On May 22, 1962, Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt forwarded a letter of complaint about Cox and two other Kennedy bench appointees to Robert Kennedy. The attorney general wrote Mrs. Roosevelt that the administration had had "some disappointment" in the appointment of district judges, but said he thought it was "still too early for anyone to sit in judgment" on Cox and several other new ap-

pointees.

"Judge Cox did issue a restraining order recently in a voting rights case, after having been criticized by the court of appeals for failing to issue one in another case," Kennedy wrote. "I still hope that all . . . of these judges, as well as the other judges in the South, will do their duty."

The Marshall papers show that part of the ABA file on Cox includes the judge's repeated references to Negro plaintiffs in a voting rights case of March 1964 as "a bunch of niggers" and as acting like "a bunch of chimpanzees."

Cox, who today is still considered hostile to some civil rights cases, last year told a federal grand jury investigating the shooting deaths of two black students at Jackson State College that students involved in violent

demonstrations should expect to be shot. The jury took no action. Judge Cox's statement to the jury later was cited by a state grand jury in a presentment defending the police action at Jackson State.

Another letter in the Marshall papers reflects the problem the young boyish-looking Attorney General had in establishing credibility with older federal judges who were brought up in a southern society which has always paid special homage to the wisdom of age.

"I am somewhat your senior in age," wrote U.S. District Judge Ben C. Dawkins Jr. of Shreveport, La., to Robert Kennedy on June 18, 1964, "and without giving unwarranted advice, commend to your consideration the fundamental idea that people are different, that forced associations cannot and will not work, that freedom of association is a fundamental which cannot be ignored, and that proposals which are to be included by statute such as the 1964 civil rights bill . . . are unworkable."

In a letter of reply, Kennedy thanked Judge Dawkins for his views, but added:

"I do disagree with you with respect to your conclusions about the Civil Rights Act of 1964. I don't believe the act is unworkable, nor do I feel that it interferes with any basic right of the individual. To the contrary, I believe it enhances the dignity and worth of all individuals in the best American tradition."

JFK Was Told of Personal,

TEXAS, From A1

The trip was planned for the fall and, according to correspondence in the White House files, intensified the Democratic infighting in Texas. On Sept. 16, Maury Maverick Jr., a state executive committeeman and a Yarborough ally, wrote to Arthur Schlesinger Jr., then a presidential assistant:

"There is a terrible fight going on down here in Texas and, to mention a highly delicate subject, this is true between Sen. Yarborough and the Vice President. . . . As a private in the rear ranks of the Democratic Party, I deeply recommend that Yarborough be on the (President's) plane."

Maverick also urged that Rep. Henry Gonzalez (D-Tex.) and some prominent Texas blacks be included in the group that would accompany the President and Vice President to Texas. And he added: "Then put Bobby Kennedy in the back of the plane with a whip in his hand to make every-

body act nice." Schlesinger forwarded Maverick's letter to O'Connell.

President Kennedy, the files show, was trying to carry out an even-handed policy toward the two battling Texas Democratic factions. An invitation to the President to attend a dinner for Yarborough in Austin in mid-October was declined but, after clearing the matter with Mr. Johnson, Postmaster General John Gronouski was sent. The President also made a TV tape for the dinner praising Yarborough.

But the intra-party warfare continued. The files include a letter from Bill Kilgarlin, then Harris County (Houston) Democratic chairman, to Robert Kennedy warning that a dinner in Houston on Nov. 21 was being "rigged for the purpose of showing greater popularity of the Vice President than the President."

Only the floor of the 12,000-capacity Houston Coliseum would be used, Kilgarlin wrote, by "persons who are more closely identified

with the Vice President. Tickets for the affair have been taken in large blocks by interests that have never been too friendly with the Democratic Party in the past."

Because the 10,000 balcony seats in the arena were not to be opened to rank-and-file Democrats, the county chairman warned, "those in attendance may well indicate by their applause, etc., a preference for the Vice President . . ."

"I am genuinely concerned that a three-quarter empty house and a reception of the President inferior to that given the Vice President will be played upon by a hostile press as a sign of the President's weakness in Texas, which is not true. There is no doubt in my mind that the President can carry Texas in 1964 . . ."

"I realize that you neither have the time nor the inclination to concern yourself with the internal struggles existing within the Democratic Party in 50 different states. This to me, however, represents more than just internal warfare.

Political Peril in Texas

To me, the public image and prestige of the President is at stake."

Kilgarlin also denied to the President's brother that he and other Texas liberals had inspired a story in a Texas newspaper that Kennedy advance men for the trip were dealing exclusively with supporters of the Johnson-Connally faction. "I suspect that its origin can be traced to sources close to the Vice President," he wrote.

Robert Kennedy sent the letter on to O'Donnell at the White House, a scribbling in the margin in his small, tight handwriting: "Kenny — I thought this was worth your taking note of. Please return and I will answer. Do you have any thoughts?" The files, however, do not include any reply to Kilgarlin from the Attorney General.

Meanwhile, the public climate in Texas also was volatile. In late October, U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson was assaulted in Dallas. In a letter dated Oct. 28 to the President's press secretary, Pierre Salinger, Mrs. Nellie M. Doyle of Dallas referred to that incident and wrote:

"Although I do not consider myself an 'alarmist,' I do fervently hope that President Kennedy can be dissuaded from appearing in public in the city of Dallas, Tex., as much as I would appreciate and enjoy hearing and seeing him.

"This 'hoodlum mob' here in Dallas is frenzied and infuriated because their attack upon Ambassador Adlai Stevenson on the 24th backfired on them. I have heard that some of them have said that they 'have just started.'

"No number of policemen, plainclothesmen or militia can control the 'air,' Mr. Salinger. It is a dreadful thought, but all remember the fate of President McKinley. These people are crazy, or crazed, and I am sure that we must realize that their actions in the future are unpredictable."

Salinger sent the letter to O'Donnell, the files show, and it was returned to him with the typed addition: "Mr. O'Donnell has noted."



RALPH YARBOROUGH
... fought Connally, LBJ

Salinger on Nov. 8, just two weeks before the President's assassination, wrote to Mrs. Doyle:

"I most appreciate your letter of Oct. 28. I think it would be a most unhappy thing if there were a city in the United States that the President could not visit. The President certainly hopes that he will be able to get to Dallas, if not on this current trip, (then) sometime in the future."

The correspondence covering events leading up to Mr. Kennedy's assassination comprises only a minute portion of the 3.3 million unclassified documents in 62 subject categories now available to students, scholars and other researchers.

About 5 per cent of unclassified Kennedy White House papers remain unavailable, screened out to protect the privacy of individuals by a committee headed by Burke Marshall, assistant attorney general for civil rights in the Kennedy administration. No documents classified for national security reasons are included.

The papers currently are held in the federal records center here, along with assorted memorabilia of President Kennedy, such as the rocking chair he used in his White House office and many paintings and sculptures. All will be moved, hopefully by 1975, to the John F. Kennedy library in Cambridge, construction of which is to start next year.