





THE BETRAYAL OF JFK KEPT FIDEL CASTRO IN POWER

THE SECOND IN A SERIES OF INVESTIGATIVE REPORTS
BY L. FLETCHER PROUTY

The success of the Bay of Pigs invasion depended on the destruction of Castro's three T-33 jets. JFK believed those planes were going to be wiped out. But someone deliberately stopped orders to have them destroyed, resulting in the Bay of Pigs debacle. JFK was blamed, falsely. The guilt rested with a group of faceless men who had to prove to JFK that the real power was theirs.

Oil-black waves in the Caribbean lapped against the rusty Landing Ship Tank. President John F. Kennedy was asleep at his private home, Glen Ora, in northern Virginia. Allen Dulles, boss of the CIA, was so sure of the success of the operation that he went on a weekend pleasure jaunt to Puerto Rico. It was one-thirty on the moonless morning of April 17, 1961. All was quiet in the Bay of Pigs. H hour was set for sunrise.

On command, eight engines on four souped-up B-26 bombers growled to life. The place was Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua — a secret airfield. The CIA-modified B-26's were fast. Each one had eight bridge-busting 50-caliber machine guns packed into the nose. The B-26's had been specially designed for the CIA's rebel uprising against

Sukarno in Indonesia in 1958. They had sunk ships, strafed cities and towns, and blasted oil refineries. Now they were part of the hard-hitting air-cover armada which had been put together by the U.S. Air Force for the CIA and its "CAT Airlines" flying professionals to support the Cuban exile brigade on the beach.

The Bay of Pigs operation was simple and foolproof — if carried out as planned. The exile brigade would hit the beach and hold it for seventy-two hours, and then a government-in-exile would be proclaimed. That government-in-exile would appeal to the Organization of American States, and immediately an OAS force would lend aid. That beach was selected because the only approaches for Castro's defending force were over narrow

John F. Prouty

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causeways. Once the brigade was in place with its artillery and machine guns, none of Castro's troops would be able to come down those causeways. The brigade would be equipped and sustained from its two loaded LST's offshore and the huge force of air transport aircraft available from the CIA-Rebel air bases in Latin America—primarily at Retalhuleu, Guatemala; Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua; and Florida. The CIA had assembled more than enough C-46's and four-engine C-54's, all with trained air-drop capability. The keystone of the entire operation was a simple plan made by the CIA's clandestine Air Division.

Castro had a half-dozen B-26 aircraft which, unlike the CIA B-26's, had no machine guns. They were light bombers. He had a few old British combat fighters, called Sea Furies, and he had three T-33 jets. The T-33's each had two 50-caliber machine guns. That was not much fire power, but with their high speed those jets had a huge advantage over the CIA B-26's and the 50-caliber guns were lethal. The Air Division plan called for the destruction of Castro's combat aircraft on the ground before the brigade hit the beach. This was an absolute must. Everyone knew that. Kennedy knew that. Allen Dulles knew that. Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Lyman L. Lemnitzer, knew that, and all the key CIA mission commanders knew that. The principal CIA combat commander was a U.S. Marine Corps Colonel, and he knew that. If Castro's aircraft were destroyed first, there would be no need for air cover. The B-26's would be air support.

On the Saturday before the Monday of the invasion, the exile brigade's B-26's had taken off to destroy the Cuban Air Force planes on the ground. They totaled the B-26's and the Sea Furies. They did not find the T-33's. A U-2 was sent up to locate them. It found them parked wing tip to wing tip near Santiago, Cuba. They would easily be destroyed at sunrise on Monday.

In the dark of that moonless night,

the CIA mission commander in Nicaragua rode his bicycle toward those four B-26's. He signaled them to fire up their engines and stand by. Then he waited for the release from Washington, which would tell him all was going according to plan, to send the bombers on their way. The commander knew the mission depended upon the success of this operation. He was ready, and the crack Cuban crews were raring to go. Their orders were to strike that small base where the T-33's were parked, coming in at sunrise with the sun at their tails and flying low to avoid possible radar and ground fire.

The idea for a Bay of Pigs operation did not begin all at once; it grew. During the last few months of 1958, it became clear that Batista was going to run and that Castro was going to lead his band of rebels out of the Sierra Maestre and into Havana. Late in December of 1958, Castro was on the march and close to Havana.

On the Washington Mall near the reflecting pool were several World War II

Why had the CIA destroyed its own operation? What did the CIA gain in the defeat of the Cuban exile brigade and the degradation of the Kennedy Administration?

temporary buildings converted into offices for the clandestine services of the CIA. During the last week of December 1958, the CIA created a task force under J.C. King, the Chief of the Western Hemisphere Division, and his deputy, Jake Esterline. The object of this task force was to be ready to move instantly if the Government decided to stop Castro before he reached Havana. But the Government had decided to take no action, and Castro entered Havana unopposed. Many people were unhappy with that decision.

It didn't take long to find out that Castro was a ruthless dictator. Hundreds of Cubans died at the wall. Thousands fled the country. Castro met with Nixon later that year, and Nixon declared that if Castro was not a Communist, he certainly acted like one. The ranks of refugees swelled. President Eisenhower thought Cuban males would be most effective and manageable if they enlisted in the Army. Someone decided it would be better to put them in special Cuban

training camps to keep them together and out of the way of the regular Army.

The CIA took over an old Army base in Panama—Ft. Gulick—and began training the Cubans there. This was the beginning of what became the invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

In 1958 the CIA attempted a very large rebel operation against the Sukarno Government of Indonesia. They armed and equipped more than 40,000 rebels, used substantial naval force, and put together a large air force. But this rebellion failed miserably. Nixon fired Frank Wisner, the CIA's Deputy Director of Plans (the clandestine services); the rest of the staff was scattered to the four winds. The equipment left from that huge operation was stored. The B-26 aircraft later were pulled out of mothballs for the anti-Castro effort. Because the equipment needed for a Bay of Pigs invasion was already available, the CIA did not have to go through the process of getting approval for the aircraft, which would have required full briefing on the plan.

At about the same time, the CIA decided to create a major air establishment headquarters, choosing an interior site at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. They pulled together much of the equipment from bases all over the world. The CIA's potent clandestine Air Division had C-118, C-54, C-47, C-46, C-97, and C-45 transports. It had some very special STOL aircraft designated L-28 and U-5, and it had the powerful B-26 bombers. It also had some mongrel Navy aircraft, called P2V-7's, which it kept under Air Force cover as "RB-69's," and U-2's and other reconnaissance aircraft which were supported by the Air Force in a separate organization.

By 1960 this huge Air Division base was supporting clandestine operations all over the world, and the Cuban exile bases were growing. The CIA had all the aircraft it needed and could get more from the Air Force. It was able to get Navy ships and support. What it needed most was manpower. The law did not permit the CIA to build a strong manpower base of its own; but the CIA knew how to get all it needed from the Army. The CIA knew how to get right into the Army with only a few Army people aware of what it was doing.

For many years, the Army had top secret units it called Special Forces. They had been established for a highly classified nuclear warfare role. They had very little to do in peacetime. Furthermore, in the Eisenhower military budget cuts, Special Forces were being reduced nearly to extinction. The CIA saw an opportunity.

As the Cuban exile strength grew, the CIA augmented the camps with

Special Forces Army men, Marines, and Air Force pilots. By the middle of 1960 the CIA had major force programs underway. It had constructed a training facility and air base at Retalhuleu in western Guatemala after making a very lucrative deal with its President Ydigoras. It still maintained the base in Panama. It had a very active program in the Miami area augmented by another major camp in Louisiana. At the same time, the CIA was giving the Cubans something to do with long-range air-drop programs over Cuba and with a number of over-the-beach operations. One of these projects, set up by Air Division, used a special Helio Courier L-28 STOL aircraft to land on a small road near Havana to infiltrate a team trained to attempt to assassinate Fidel Castro. We went to great lengths to support this operation, and the plane returned safely. The pilot informed us that he had left the assassin team exactly as planned. Later we learned Castro's forces had rounded up the team; thus, the project failed. The Cuban exiles and the CIA never seemed to accept how effective Castro's "Block System" was in defending against infiltration; most air-drop teams and most over-the-beach teams were captured.

By the summer of 1960 it was clear to the few people who could see beneath the shield of secrecy that while the Eisenhower Administration was going one way, the clandestine machinations of the CIA were going another; Vice President Nixon sat between the two, playing both sides to his own ends.

On a platform in Detroit a swarthy, charismatic Cuban exile aroused thousands of American Legionnaires with a promise to liberate Cuba under the flag of a gallant exile brigade. On Eisenhower's orders, air-drop and over-the-beach missions had been authorized; but they were small, secret, and selective. Under Eisenhower there never was a plan to invade Cuba. There may have been hope for it on the part of the Cubans, but the President had not sanctioned such an act. As a matter of fact, we had explicit orders not to become involved in any operation which in any way would carry over from the Eisenhower Administration into the next Administration, either Nixon or Kennedy. These orders were explicit and understood by all of us in the clandestine game during the crucial mid-summer of 1960.

Then Senator Kennedy began to make his moves. JFK aimed for the Presidency. He was unique. He not only campaigned long and hard to weld together a knowledgeable, hard-hitting team, he also carried that team over into his Administration. They began to dig into the clandestine

dungheap. The magnetic Cuban speaker in Detroit, Manuel Artime, was the ace in the CIA's anti-Castro deck; but JFK got to him. On the very same day Artime and his other Cuban inner circle exiles were escorted into the Pentagon's super-secret Office of Special Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense—on that very same day—those same Cubans were spirited away from the CIA into the office of Senator Jack Kennedy. JFK one-upped the CIA and the Pentagon and Nixon on Cuban affairs even before that crucial TV debate with Nixon. Kennedy didn't get all of the inside data; but he kept Nixon and the CIA cabal on their toes.

By October 1960 this insiders' cabal decided it was time to make several moves. If Nixon won the election, they would be well on their way with several major clandestine operations in full swing. If Kennedy won, the cabal might have enough momentum to overpower any deflecting moves he might make. And if the secret opera-

Day after day the lesson became clearer. The CIA had signaled Kennedy that his political fate was under CIA control, just as was Eisenhower's in the U-2 incident.

tions failed, Kennedy would be blamed because no one knew they were initiated before he became President.

The word went out to step up the Cuban exile training in Florida, Louisiana, Panama, and Guatemala. Orders were placed with the U.S. Air Force to hasten delivery of a large number of the CIA-modified B-26 bombers. The exile group was being called an invasion brigade. The Alabama National Guard, which trained with B-26's, was called upon to step up B-26 air combat training for Cuban pilots and air crewmen. This was in addition to Air Force cadres and swarms of pilots and crews from Air America. Two large Landing Ship Tanks (LST) were purchased from storage and outfitted for the invasion. A caravan of Army trucks and other combat vehicles were ordered for delivery by rail to an out-of-the-way Naval facility at Elizabeth City, North Carolina.

Then the CIA sent a special team of handpicked agents to Ft. Gordon, Georgia to acquire surreptitiously the

entire curriculum of the U.S. Army's Public Affairs and Military Government course.

When the new Special Forces concept had been whipped into shape, it was brought to Army Special Forces school at Ft. Bragg without the knowledge of the Army headquarters or of the Continental Army Command. The CIA was on its way to getting what it needed most—limitless trained manpower at no dollar cost. (I piloted the airplane on that trip to Ft. Gordon. With me were General Edward G. Lansdale, the CIA's legendary underground operator, and General Sam Wilson, formerly the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency. Upon return we divided that curriculum into thirds and rewrote it for Special Forces and the CIA.)

Kennedy was elected President in a squeaker, and almost immediately he announced that he would retain Allen Dulles as Director of Central Intelligence and J. Edgar Hoover as head of the FBI. The CIA accelerated its undercover work. Now the Cuban exile brigade was specifically trained as an invasion force. B-26's were rushed to completion on an Air Force modification line in Arizona and then delivered to the Agency. The CIA had a bigger, more modern, and harder-hitting air force for the Cuban exiles than almost any air force in Latin America. If all went as planned, the exile brigade would have plenty of air cover and support. The task force planners knew that Castro's air force would be destroyed first. Their brigade's mission was to provide support for the troops on the beach. They were trained to bomb and strafe the open causeways and the roads to the beach. Their job would be simple. They could easily destroy any approaching ground force Castro could throw against the exile troops dug in on the beach.

That was the plan. Only three small jets parked on an airfield near Santiago stood between success and failure. General C.P. Cabell, Dulles' CIA Deputy, who was running the operation in Dulles' absence, knew that as he monitored events at the Command Center in Washington.

The engines on those four bombers at Puerto Cabezas idled slowly as the minutes grew to hours. If they were to strike at dawn, they had to leave as scheduled. It was a long way to Santiago across the Caribbean. The CIA Operations Control officer got on his bicycle again and pedaled back to the communications tent to see if the orders releasing the planes had come. The Cubans in the B-26's were angry and impatient. The thought crossed the

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agent's mind that they might mutiny and go anyhow. The CIA agent wished they would go. But there were no orders from Washington.

The CIA mission commander was an old friend of mine. We had been through many clandestine operations together. We had complete confidence in each other. At about 2 A.M. Washington time on April 17, my home telephone rang. The mission commander was calling from Nicaragua. He explained what was happening. He held the phone up, and I could hear the roaring B-26 engines. He emphasized the crucial timing for that essential flight. They had to go. He asked me to call the CIA Command Center and to talk to them about getting the release out immediately. The fate of the operation hung on that thin thread. The thread broke.

There have been many versions of the Bay of Pigs. All have been written by people who were not involved. Robert D. Morrow wrote a fantastic account in a book called *Betrayal*. His account is incorrect. Reporters have written about the Bay of Pigs, but they reported only what they could find out from others. They were not involved. They knew only what they were told.

The most contrived account is contained in John Ehrlichman's recent novel, *The Company*. He has his "JFK" President "deciding to insure the failure of the operation while, at the same time, not calling it off."

There are other accounts of this crucial event. One of these which appears to be authentic because of the inner sanctum role of the author is Arthur Schlesinger's *One Thousand Days*. He recalls: "At 4:30 A.M. [invasion morning] Cabell awoke Rusk and [later] appealed to President Kennedy" to permit the vital B-26 mission to go. There is no evidence Cabell called JFK even then; nor was there any reason to call at that time.

This was a clever ruse. Remember, I was called about 2 A.M. At 2 A.M., or even 3 A.M., there was still time for the B-26's to fly from Nicaragua to Santiago and hit their targets by daybreak; by 4:30 A.M. it was much too late. To be effective, the B-26's had to hit those T-33's on the ground no later than daybreak. This was crucial! The brigade was set to hit the beach at dawn. They knew that even before they hit the beach they could be discovered. They were! At dawn the alarm was flashed across Cuba, and the T-33's went into action.

When Cabell withheld the release orders from his mission commander in Nicaragua, he doomed the whole oper-

ation to failure. This means that a purported "4:30 A.M. call from Cabell to Rusk" was meaningless except in the event Cabell wanted Rusk, Bundy, and Schlesinger to believe he was trying to carry out the operation instead of thwarting it.

Schlesinger's account proves this. He says: "Castro's Air Force, alerted by the first clash, reacted with vigor." The only combat air force Castro had that morning were those three T-33's. Then Schlesinger adds: "Castro's forgotten T-33's shot four [B-26's] down," [Emphasis added]. Schlesinger's use of the word "forgotten" is strange. What in hell does he think all of us were doing that long night? Those T-33's were on everyone's mind. Cabell didn't forget them. We all screamed to him for action against them. He simply let the moment pass, and the whole operation went down the drain. None of us have forgotten that.

It was Schlesinger, along with Tracy Barnes of the CIA, who was called upon to brief our Ambassador to the U.N., Adlai Stevenson, on the Bay of Pigs invasion. However, Stevenson was not given the whole story and was not prepared to defend the Government's position adequately before the United Nations, causing the U.S. unnecessary embarrassment before the world. Schlesinger was too much a part of that debacle to want to tell it like it was.

During the early days of the Watergate coverup, Nixon's fear of E. Howard Hunt was revealed by a statement found on the infamous tapes. Nixon considered Hunt's demand for \$1 million a reasonable request and said that the money could be gotten. In effect, Hunt blackmailed the White House for \$1 million, and Nixon was willing to pay it. Now, what did Nixon think Hunt knew about him that was worth so much money?

As Vice President, Nixon was the Chairman of the Special Group of the National Security Council (NSC). This is the organization which approves and plans all clandestine activities. It directs the CIA. Hunt was one of the political officers on the Bay of Pigs operation. He was not an operational officer, but he knew everything about the early days of recruitment of the Cubans and the selection and designation of those who would rule Cuba if Castro was overthrown. He understood Nixon's part in approving the plans to assassinate Castro, to invade Cuba, and to let Kennedy answer for it in the event that Kennedy won the election.

Hunt was an intimate of Allan Dulles' and the author of Dulles' master epic, *The Craft of Intelligence*, and he

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and took a deep drag. All his buddies roared with laughter as they slapped his back.

A hostess handed Miki a large pad of paper and a thick felt-tip pen. The men started calling out figures. "Ten dollars!" "Fifteen!" "Eighteen!" "Twenty dollars!"

The one who shouted twenty-five was the winner. Miki asked his name. "Pete," he yelled at her.

She straddled the pad, stuck the pen in her cunt, and squatted down so that the pen touched the paper. She moved quickly, positioning the pen with great skill and experience.

She dropped the pen and reached down to tear the top sheet off the pad. When she held it up everyone could see that it plainly read in large block letters—TO PETE WITH LOVE, PATI.

The man came forward for his souvenir autograph. When he handed Miki the twenty-five dollars, she handed him both the paper and the pen. He sniffed the latter and gave a rebel yell. The crowd picked it up.

It was then that Miki saw Dennis standing over by the door to the men's room. He was watching her. She didn't know how much he had seen. Well, she thought with resignation, it didn't matter. Any of her act would have been too much.

She didn't know why she felt so ashamed. He knew that she'd been a prostitute. Why did it seem better to put strange men's pricks into her cunt than to enter it with cigars and pens and coins and bottles? She didn't know why, but it did.

Her eyes met his. He turned and walked out of the club. For an instant she wanted to follow him—despite her nudity, despite the last trickle of champagne on her inner thighs, despite what he must be thinking.

But she didn't follow him. She stayed. She stayed and finished her act. She stayed and played Ping-Pong with a customer. She used a tight, no-hands grip. She stayed and blew out lit matches. She stayed and played a short tune on a plastic flute. Without using her mouth.

She'd miss Dennis, of course, but the choice was his.

She was happy when he called the next morning. She was surprised. 🐱

Shazona Tao-Song lives in Hawaii. Yellow Girls in the Golden West, a collection of her short stories, will be published next fall.

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knew the inner workings of the CIA. Nixon feared what Hunt knew and what he imagined Hunt knew. Because Hunt has never revealed what he knows about Nixon's part in the Bay of Pigs, he must have been paid off.

Ehrlichman speaks for the anti-Kennedy faction which has learned a revisionist history by talking to themselves in a barrel. There are many things about the CIA that Ehrlichman does not know. John Ehrlichman wrote a novel; he may revise history as he wishes, but it should be made clear that Kennedy did not "insure the failure of the invasion" unless Ehrlichman blames him for keeping Dulles and Cabell at the helm of the CIA. That was JFK's mistake; he gave them the opportunity to assure the failure of the invasion.

The question hangs on the use of the military term "air cover." The Cuban exiles had plenty of air cover—provided Castro's aircraft were destroyed on the ground as the tactical plan required. Four B-26's were scheduled to do that simple, straightforward job. Then about thirty B-26's would have had an uncontested field day against Castro's unprotected ground forces. The term "air cover" means that planes shoot down other planes in the air. The exile brigade's B-26's were propeller planes and no match for Castro's T-33 jets in the air. That is why the T-33's had to be destroyed on the ground. "Air support" is planes shooting at ground targets, such as trucks. This is the job the B-26's were designed for.

After the call I received from Nicaragua, I spoke to the CIA Command Center. I told them about my call. I emphasized the urgency of action as planned. I was not in the CIA line of command and could do no more than pass on the word from Nicaragua. I had worked with most of those clandestine operators since 1955 and knew them well. I knew how dedicated they were and that they, too, wanted the release from Cabell. They believed he must have had some political or other important reason for holding back, but they assured me they would do everything possible to expedite the orders to the commander at Puerto Cabezas.

The release never came. We'll never know exactly why. Cabell was a lifelong military officer with a splendid record. Cabell obeyed orders. But, in this case, whose orders? He belonged to the ultra-Cold War sect, and he was more a Nixon enthusiast than a Kennedy man.

Not much later, JFK fired Cabell. Kennedy may have learned what he

needed to know.

If you don't agree with this account, then consider what followed: The other air crews thought the Puerto Cabezas bombers had carried out their orders, so they went ahead with their part of the tactical plan. They flew to the beach and began to provide air support. At least sixteen of those planes were shot down by the T-33 jets, and at least thirty-two crewmen died, many of them Americans.

That morning those three T-33's sank both invasion supply ships. That ended the nearby offshore supply support. During the next two days those jets raked the beach and covered Castro's troops as they advanced on the brigade which had dug in just above the high-tide line. The invasion failed totally. President Kennedy accepted the blame and later fired Allen Dulles.

The thought crossed the agent's mind that the exile brigade might mutiny and go anyhow. The CIA agent wished they would go. But there were no orders.

Immediately thereafter, the Kennedy team coalesced and began a thorough investigation of what had happened and how the CIA had managed to blow a sure thing. An investigating committee was established. It consisted of Allen Dulles, Admiral Arleigh Burke, General Maxwell Taylor, and Bobby Kennedy. That strange group was closeted in a windowless room in the JCS area of the Pentagon for weeks while it listened to the stories of hundreds of people. Dulles and Taylor led with the questions. Dulles selected most of the men interrogated. Arleigh Burke listened and supported the JCS uniformed military version of the plan as he knew it. Bobby Kennedy sat quietly and listened. His silence, day after day, was ominous. It was the most powerful force in that room.

Each evening Bobby would meet with Jack Kennedy and the Irish inner circle—O'Donnell, Sorensen, O'Brien, and others. Each evening they would go over every word spoken in the inquiry. They looked for clues to the CIA's behavior. They tried to answer the questions: Why had the CIA destroyed its own operation? What did the CIA gain in the defeat of the Cubans and in the degradation of the Kennedy Administration? Day after day the lesson became clearer. The CIA had signaled Kennedy that his political fate was under CIA control, just as was Eisenhower's in the U-2 incident.

Why didn't Cabell call Allen Dulles? There is no evidence that he ever did,

and I recall, in the anger and disappointment of the CIA operators after the disaster, that I never heard anyone bring Dulles' name into the picture. Until some other explanation is found, there is no way to exonerate Cabell.

The committee learned all of this and more. It met daily until well into May 1961. Then it issued no written report. No report was necessary. JFK found out all he needed to know. Early in June 1961 he signed some very important Presidential directives, known as National Security Action Memoranda 55, 56, and 57. These papers are the basis of the story told by Senator Mansfield, among others, that JFK said he would tear the CIA into a thousand pieces.

NSAM 55 was a most unusual directive. It was directed specifically to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, and it was signed personally by Kennedy. Ordinarily, the President would address the Chairman directly only in time of actual war. Kennedy viewed that paper as a declaration that "peace-time operations," a euphemism for clandestine activities in time of peace, were as important to him as actual war-time operations and that he wanted the Chairman to be his adviser in such instances.

Kennedy planned to establish control over the CIA during the remainder of his first term in office. He confided to many that he would complete that Herculean task during his second term. He never achieved that; he was not able to restrain the growth of the war in Vietnam; he was not able to keep the lid on the growth of the CIA-inspired Special Forces; he was not alive by the end of his first term in office.

It is interesting to note that the Church Committee, the Senate Committee created to investigate the CIA, has published in Volume IV of its findings what purports to be a history of the CIA. This "official" history unaccountably misquotes the law which created the Agency and misstates the duties and responsibilities of the CIA. Then it proceeds to list chronologically all of the NSC top level directives which outlined the CIA's role in covert activities. Although the chronology is almost complete, this important historical document ignores and omits Kennedy's directives, NSAM 55, 56, and 57. Such a glaring oversight does more to highlight the behind-the-scenes power and adroitness of the CIA than anything else. This is what Presidents have had to fight; it is what President Carter is tangled up in today. 🐱

L. Fletcher Prouty served as liaison officer between the Pentagon and the CIA. He is the author of The Secret Team (Prentice Hall) and numerous investigative articles.