

3/20/90

Because I have always suspected that Sculz has had CIA connections I was surprised at his seeming fairness through the first two-thirds of this book. My suspicions came from his books on the Dominican intervention by Lyndon Johnson and his first book on Cuba, with, as I now recall Karl Meyer. I was also quite suspicious over something that I've not seen reported or in any Watergate book, his deliberate effort to keep E. Howard Hunt, who he knew well, out of Watergate reporting. He then said that he knew "Eduardo," the alias Hunt used, and it was Bernard Barker. Not long after that he and the New York Times parted company.

Only a few things in this book, up to where he writes about Castro in the Sierra Madre mountains, were in accord with my suspicion before opening the book, that he'd not write what the CIA did not want if he, in fact, did not write what it did want.

The first was his exaggerated effort to portray Castro as a life-long Communist. In doing this he used what Castro said years later, long after he said he was a Communist, what it then served Castro's interest to say, dependent as he and Cuba were on Soviet aid. He also confused socialist and communist. Castro was talking about socialism in his early days, when he refused to join the Communist party, even after his brother Raul did.

So, while it does not seem to be a CIA book through these pages, it also holds nothing to which the CIA could object. It begins to change at about 478.

When he writes about the successful struggle to oust Batista and the early days of the Castro regime, he is notably lacking in any reference to some of the more telling interventions by the Eisenhower administration. Where he does report that the administration wanted to get rid of Castro he is in effect covering up for the CIA. But he has no mention of what was so crucial for Castro, the petroleum crisis he faced. This came first when the American owners of the oil refinery were charging exorbitant prices for essential petroleum products and then when they refused to refine crude that Castro bought elsewhere at much, much less than they were charging. This is what forced Castro to nationalize the oil refinery, his first nationalization. He had earlier talked about nationalizing public utilities but Sculz does not go into these other nationalizations (I'm at 488).

These omissions and his portrayal of Castro as a Communist beginning in his school days tend to justify all the U.S. did to Cuba and Castro to those who regard anything alleged to be anti-Communist as proper. He carries this a step farther in stating that the U.S. could not tolerate a revolution in Cuba. (Not "would" but "could.")

I also wondered where Sculz refers to the first reporters to visit Castro in the mountains, in the earliest days of his armed struggle. He spends a little time on Herbert Matthews, the first to interview Castro. But he does not say what happened to Matthews at the New York Times as a result of his favorable rather than unfavorable reporting of the Castro revolution: his successful career there did not survive. Not mentioned.

He makes two references to CBS News' Robert Taber, but not a word about the fact that his career at CBS did not survive his favorable reporting. (He then engaged in open pro-Castro activity the exact nature of which I do not now recall.) He makes only passing reference to Andrew St. George, and omits his name from the index. He fails to say what publication, if any, St. George represented, or where his political sympathies lay. I knew Andy not long after that and he was openly, boastfully, a Hungarian monarchist and a sexist, treating his wife, at least in front of others, as a servant. But all his writing of which I know, and his other activities, are anti-Castro. What he was doing in the mountains when Sculz makes no mention of his reporting seems suspicious. He was involved in anti-Castro activities, not the norm of reporters. Sculz cannot not have known about this.

The wonder I have is that the Andy I knew could have thought of going into the mountains, he was that fat and overweight. Of course he need not have been a decade or more earlier.

In any event, to the point I've read there is nothing I've seen that the CIA would be hurt by or oppose.

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By page 498 Sculz still has not told his reader what the major compulsion applied by the Eisenhower administration was. No mention of the petroleum crisis at all, or to the very unusual break in relations three weeks before the JFK administration took office. ~~But~~ On this page there was a convenient place, albeit belatedly, to inform the reader. But instead there is only a passing reference to "the final breach in Cuban-American economic ties." Sculz's avoidance cannot be accidental - it was a major event at the time and had the greatest significance afterward. I regard his failure to even mention this, leave alone give it the treatment it requires, as dishonest. (In breaking relations with Castro and Cuba only three weeks before the new administration came in the Eisenhower/Nixon administration was making its policy for the new administration and boxing it in, really eliminating all choices. With the campaign against Castro and his alleged Communism a major propaganda ploy of the GOP, there was no chance that any Democratic administration would recognize Cuba after it came in.)

On page 510 he does mention some Cuban nationalizations of U.S. property, including oil refineries, but still no mention of what the oil refiners did and did not do. He does have a bobtailed reference later and, after references to the much later ~~May~~ Cuba Missile Crisis and other matters of other dates, which tend to confuse the reader on chronology, he does mention economic warfare (517), tending to put the blame for it on Cuba. He reports that the US cancelled the rest of that year's contract for Cuban sugar and has the nationalizations in response to that. (519-20) This makes the Eisenhower break in relations not referred to here at all, even more unusual in timing, so close to the beginning of the JFK administration and so much later than the nationalizations.

He has Castro going to New York and the UN 9/60 as much to meet Khrushchev as to be at the UN (520), skips around again and then (523ff) goes into the US attempts against Castro's life, dating them to "the 'Program' against him approved by ~~the~~ Eisenhower in March." (523) He cites a CIA memo dating the assassination project that August and on page 524 gives the names of all those prominently involved in the mafia plots for the CIA. None are indexed. The first meeting of the plotters was 9/14, in New York.

This, of course, makes it clear that the JFK administration could not have been responsible for those particular plots, despite the CIA's deceptiveness on this as well as that of those who did not like the JFK administration.

In this section he mentions the Shemchenko defection at the UN but does not say he had been working for the CIA before he defected or what he later did.

He has made the Eisenhower administration's determination to overthrow the Castro government quite clear, dating it to well before the beginning of the election campaign, and only at the end of the chapter gets around to its strongest diplomatic acts against Cuba, the ambassador's withdrawal in October, accompanied by the prohibition of all US exports to Cuba. He then switches to the insignificant CIA-sponsored anti-Castro groups in the mountains and closes the chapter with reference to JFK. He begins the next chapter with the JFK administration and to date has not mentioned the break in relations by the Eisenhower administration.

This was Chapter 3 of Book 4. He has but a single source note for the entire chapter, to a conversation between Ernest Hemingway and Castro. *Very skimpy notes.*

On page 533 he finally reports that Eisenhower broke relations with Cuba January 3, 1961, but he does not evaluate how unusual it was to make such a diplomatic move only three days more than two weeks before the new administration comes into office. In a sense he deprecates it by referring to it as a "farewell gesture." Gesture??

538-9 he reports Khrushchev's assurance of opposition to an US anti-Castro armed acts, again switching time frames back to Eisenhower. Confusing readers?

In leading up to the Bay of Pigs he states that Castro and the Cubans were well aware that an invasion was imminent. Castro's analysis, based on a Kennedy public statement,

was that the invading force would not be US military. He was correct. As he planned to rebuff the coming invasion, he even decided that the Bay of Pigs would be a good place for an invasion landing and just before it happened he placed some forces and machine-guns there. What was well known in Cuba, with Castro on the radio alerting his people almost daily about the coming invasion, was kept secret from the American people by the US press. Even though the Cubans were complaining about it to the UN. I have the UN debates in the research material for Tiger No Ride. So, even though the government was keeping its invasion plans secret, the press had access to Cuban knowledge of it at the UN and in Castro's broadcast speeches at the least. But the people here were kept in ignorance and all proceeded on the known fiction that it would be a surprise attack. This in itself was an invitation to the coming disaster.

He says on 549 that JFK signed the invasion's death warrant in prohibiting flights by the B26s he says were flown by Cubans (~~mostly if not entirely~~ ^{many were} by Americans recruited by the CIA's Double-Check Corp.) but it is my recollection that he initially prohibited the involvement of an ~~Navy~~ ^{early} planes. He lifted this when the invasion ran into trouble and the Navy goofed and was late, as I now recall in defending the B26s, but on that I'm not new certain. The Navy's timing was an hour off. But it becomes clear, he was referring to a pre-invasion B26 strike, a second one. If JFK aborted it, his experience with the first one was enough reason. Sculz did not tell the whole story about the landing of those planes in Florida. Reporters immediately saw the bullet-holes in some of them and that gave it away - if the papers had pursued it. On 533 he does say that some of the B26 pilots were American and that the Navy's timing was off by an hour on its planes.

As he gets to the missile crisis he repeats his initial argument about Castro always being a communist but he does not omit the fights Castro had with the "old" Communists, who he finally eliminated, those who did not go along with his ideas, and he next argues that Operation Mongoose should not be considered as intending to involve an invasion. Inconsistently, he admits that the anti-Castro people inside Cuba were almost non-~~existent~~ ^{effective} and thus the posture of a revolution against him is silly. They were not a factor because they were leaderless, he says. (The economic damage they caused, however, was great. Sculz says it was about a billion dollars, a considerable amount for a poor and small country in those days.)

He quotes Castro as saying that the Cubans had asked the USSR for protection against a US invasion in July of that year and that it was Khrushchev who decided on the missiles. This confirms my contemporaneous belief. (580) His version of the solution to that crisis (586) is not entirely correct. He says that removing our missiles from Turkey was part of the deal, and it wasn't. (JFK had earlier ordered their removal and was astounded to learn they had not been removed.) He also says that the US guarantee was limited to promising that it would not invade Cuba. It in fact promised to protect Cuba from any invasion. The communications of that period were made public then. Khrushchev was disclosing to the press while it was being telegraphed to Washington, his second demand, which was not accepted, that the US take its missiles out of Turkey in return for his taking his home from Cuba. The US released the deal if offered and Khrushchev accepted. So when he at this point says, "there is nothing on the public record to confirm the existence of an explicit (his emph.) commitment by ~~the~~ Kennedy not to invade Cuba," one has to wonder what he had in mind because it was all over the papers and electronic media.

In so large a book, with so much trivia, it seems to reflect purposefulness when he omits what is relevant, in the instances I remember, in support of US policy. For example when he refers to the situation in Angola. He never once mentions the political background Savimbi was known to have and was quite public. He also was a Communist. He understates the CIA's backing and the history of Roberto Holden, who was the leader of the second anti-government faction and he does not point out to the reader that US policy in Angola made it the ally of the racist South African government, which could use Namibia for its military intervention only because it violated Namibia's territory and occupied and controlled it illegally. Although there is more like this, saying it and that there is nothing to which the CIA could legitimately object does not keep it from being a definitive biography of Castro and his revolution. He is usually but not always fair to Castro.