



The Night the Reds Clinched Cuba

*The story behind the decision that spelled
defeat for the attempt to liberate Cuba*

Condensed from U.S. News & World Report

A FATEFUL decision, made by President Kennedy on Sunday, April 16, 1961, is rising now to plague the United States.

On that Sunday evening an armed force of Cuban refugees, trained by the United States, was at sea, sailing secretly to invade Fidel Castro's Cuba. The American President, a few hours earlier, had given final approval to that invasion.

Only the day before, on April 15, a surprise attack by B-26 bombing planes belonging to the invaders had knocked out all but seven planes of Castro's tiny air force.

A second air strike was scheduled for Monday morning, April 17. It was to coincide with the landing of the invaders. It was supposed to finish the job of wiping out Castro's planes and to provide air support for the invasion.

Secure in this assurance of air support, the invaders went ashore in the early-morning darkness of Monday, April 17. Their landing was successful: 1400 armed men reached the beaches of a place called the Bay of Pigs.

In the battle that followed, Castro's troops suffered heavy casualties. Castro's tanks, coming up to the

battle, were sitting ducks for an attack by air. Confidently, the little invading force waited for its air support to arrive. Its leaders had assurance of that support. It was provided in the pre-invasion planning.

Hours before, on Sunday evening, a small but potent force of B-26's was sitting in readiness on an airfield 500 miles away, waiting to take off for the Bay of Pigs. Those were planes of the invasion force, with Cuban pilots.

But those planes didn't take off.

The reason: President Kennedy forbade their use.

That was the decision President Kennedy made on that Sunday evening. He decided that the anti-Castro Cubans could not have the support of their own air force during the invasion. Without that support, the invasion failed.

When the invasion began, in the predawn hours of Monday, the need of air support became apparent. Worried, the non-military officials in Washington who were running the invasion went to President Kennedy for a new decision. They suggested that U.S. Navy planes from a U.S. aircraft carrier be used to fly air support for the invaders.

Two U.S. carriers, their decks loaded with fighting planes, were standing by not far away throughout the entire invasion. Their planes were readily available.

In the planning of the invasion—planning begun under the Eisenhower administration—the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff had recom-

mended the use of U.S. air support. President Kennedy vetoed the idea. He insisted that there was to be no direct American participation. Now, with the outcome possibly hanging in the balance, military and non-military men joined in renewing the plea.

Another "No." Once again, in the early-morning hours of Monday, April 17, President Kennedy made a decision. He said "No" to the use of U.S. planes.

On the beaches, in the Bay of Pigs, the invaders fought on. They did not know that an American President in Washington, 1400 miles away, was in tight control of their every military move. They were not aware that President Kennedy had taken away their air cover.

With no air support, the invasion soon began to run into trouble. Castro brought up the few planes he had left. Castro jets—made in America—bombed and sank two of the five ships of the invasion fleet. One carried most of the invaders' reserves of ammunition. The other was their communications center. Castro tanks, safe from attack by air, moved into effective action.

In the face of this situation, President Kennedy took the wraps off the Cuban fliers. On Monday noon he said they could go into action. But bad weather interfered at first. Finally, an air strike was set up for early Wednesday.

On Tuesday, however, the situation continued to deteriorate. The invaders, fighting without air sup-

port, were driven back under pressure of Castro's superior numbers.

By Tuesday night, April 18, a crisis was clearly at hand. Once again there was an appeal to President Kennedy.

On this night the President was playing host at a Congressional reception in the White House. He left the party to confer with his advisers—both civilian and military. Again it was proposed to use U.S. planes to save the invasion.

This time the President relented slightly. He consented to using one carrier's planes for one hour on Wednesday morning—just long enough to provide cover for the invaders to land some supplies and for their planes to make a quick strike. U.S. planes, still, were not to attack land targets.

Even this limited plan for U.S. aid went awry. There were communications mixups. The Cuban fliers mistimed their strike. The U.S. planes never got into action. And anyway, it developed, it was too late.

By sundown of Wednesday, April 19, the invasion was a failure. The invaders inflicted close to 2000 casualties on Castro's forces, suffered only 100 or so casualties of their own. But without air support the invaders could not hold out. Most of them wound up as Castro captives.

American military officials who followed this operation closely say that it came within a hairbreadth of success. They say: Given early air support, the invaders could have de-

stroyed Castro's air force and tanks. Defections from his militia, which had started, would have spread. Underground forces, waiting for word of success before rising against Castro, would have sprung into action. When that word did not come, they remained underground.

It was in the White House that the decision was made that guided the course of that unsuccessful invasion.

Out of that fateful decision of the President have flowed many of today's problems. Soviet Russia today is entrenched in Cuba, a few miles from the continental United States. Some members of Congress charge that the Monroe Doctrine, which guided U.S. policy in Latin America for 139 years, is now, in effect, being turned into a scrap of paper. With a base in Cuba, communist forces are penetrating deeply into the Western Hemisphere, building up their base for more take-overs.

What lay back of that decision?

The record suggests: An important factor was a fear of offending public opinion in Latin America and in the so-called "new nations" of the United Nations.

Throughout the discussions of invasion policy, the idea was put forward repeatedly that the United States must not place itself in the position of using force against a smaller neighbor. Dean Rusk, Secretary of State, strongly backed President Kennedy in his decisions.

What the military recommended. The U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, the

nation's top military experts, had no part in the actual military operations. Those military leaders had recommended early that, to ensure success, some U.S. armed forces should take part in any invasion, and that air cover and support should be supplied by the United States.

The recommendations of the military leaders were rejected. It was the Central Intelligence Agency and the White House that finally ran the show and fixed the terms on which the anti-Castro Cubans could fight.

The fateful decision was a political decision—not a military decision. One civilian official who was close

to the whole invasion operation now makes this judgment:

"In retrospect, the political decision was wrong."

A military man, also close to the operation, said this:

"If you go back to that time and look at the whole problem, you find that this country faced one fundamental question: Can we permit a communist country in this Western Hemisphere? Now, if the answer is 'Yes,' then you do one thing. If the answer is 'No,' you do another.

"But if you weasel on that answer, start compromising, then you wind up in confusion—with no real answer."

Is the Monroe Doctrine Dead?

BY O. K. ARMSTRONG

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IN A NEWS conference in Moscow on July 12, 1960, Nikita Khrushchev struck at a cherished principle of U.S. foreign policy when he contemptuously declared, "The Monroe Doctrine has outlived its time, has died."

Already his agents were working in every country of the Western Hemisphere to carry on the Marxist

program of infiltration and subversion. Now he has virtually taken over Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba and made that island a Soviet colony. Last September the Soviet government arrogantly announced that it was furnishing military supplies to Cuba, and warned that any interference on the part of the United States would mean war.

Is the Monroe Doctrine dead?