

Saturday Evening Post • ..
June 8, 1963

"Help us fight!" cry the angry exiles

Frustrated by the U. S. ban on raids,
the refugees say they could topple Castro
and vow that they will do it.

By Harold H. Martin

Every day United States war planes fly patrols over all the Caribbean. Their mission is to watch ships sailing out of Cuban ports and to sound the alarm if they should see an invasion force from Castro's Communist state moving toward the shores of South or Central America. Every day, out of Opa-locka, near Miami, planes of the U.S. Coast Guard fly long patrols over the Keys and the 3,000 rocks and islets of the Bahamas. Their mission is to seek out raider camps and to watch for armed boats moving toward Cuba to do Castro harm.

The two flights with their differing missions illuminate our dual attitude toward Castro. With one hand we protect him; with the other we shield our Latin friends against him. To us, in the present

circumstances, it seems an eminently reasonable policy. To nearly a quarter-million Cuban refugees in the United States it makes no sense.

The militant Cuban raiders number perhaps no more than 100 men, but in March a handful of them brought us dangerously near to another showdown with Premier Khrushchev when they attacked his ships as they lay at anchor in Cuban harbors. Today, as a result of the furor caused by these attacks, the hand of every government agency is against the refugee raiders. In Miami, where once their main concern was Castro's snooping spies, they now must elude the restraining clutches of the FBI, the CIA, the Border Patrol, the State Department's Security Division, the intelligence agents of Immigration and Customs, and every deputy sheriff and game warden in the keys.

"In Florida, where we once were welcome," said one frustrated raider mourn-

fully, "we must now operate like guerrillas in the hills of Escambray. We are watched like criminals."

Despite all restraints, however, the exiles swear defiantly that their efforts to strike at Castro will still go on.

"It is a wide sea, with many hiding places, and Cuba's coast line is 2,000 miles long," said Tony Cuesta, a shambling, soft-spoken giant who leads a raider group called Commandos L. "If Castro's coast watchers cannot stop us from coming in, no power on earth can prevent our going there."

The challenge implicit in Tony Cuesta's words reflects the sense of anger and defiance that a quarter-million Cubans in exile share. The Cuban refugee is a deeply emotional man, given to outbursts of passion whenever he thinks of the fate that has befallen his country, and as his exile has lengthened, his temper has shortened. His regard for President Kennedy, which once verged on adulation, has soured into a bitter distrust.

This disenchantment with our policies exploded into open controversy in April. Dr. José Miró Cardona—hitherto looked upon by many Cubans as merely a mouthpiece for the Americans—resigned as president of the Cuban Revolutionary Council, which had been receiving an estimated \$2,400,000 annually in United States support. As early as October, 1961, Dr. Miró Cardona charged, President Kennedy had assured him that the Cuban situation required a "military solution," and that Cubans, when the time came, would be in the vanguard of the attack. No invasion ever came off, however, and all official sources, including Mr. Kennedy, have denied that one was ever

promised. Even Dr. Manuel Antonio de Varona, Miró Cardona's second in command, has agreed that this is so. The only confirmation for Miró's charges, in fact, has come from Fidel Castro, who said recently that the Soviets sent in their missiles because of "these plans of aggression against Cuba. . . ."

It seems probable that Miró Cardona, in his hopeful eagerness, read into the President's words promises that were not there. The fact remains that, rightly or wrongly, thousands of Cubans today are convinced that our government did trim its sails—that whatever plans were under way for bringing about the quick overthrow of Castro were nullified by an agreement made with Khrushchev at the time of the October missile crisis, an agreement that has served to protect



RAIDER MAPS A RENDEZVOUS WITH MOTHER SHIP. ENGINE FAILURE FOILED VENTURE.

Castro and to perpetuate his regime.

Doctor Miró's report of a promised "military solution" receives little support from the bitterest and most disillusioned of the Cubans in exile today—the ransomed prisoners of the Bay of Pigs. "If there was any plan for an invasion, or for any other overt action against Castro," said Manuel Artime, a slim, handsome Cuban who went into the Bay of Pigs as "civil leader" to set up a beachhead government, "we found no sign of it upon our return. That was the bitter disappointment. We came home from nearly two years in Fidel Castro's jails to find that not only was the U.S. Government doing nothing to bring about Castro's downfall but it was forbidding the Cubans themselves to harass him.

"To us," Artime continued, "this was impossible of belief. Here in the United States were 50,000 Cubans of fighting

age. Out of that number, a guerrilla army of at least 10,000 could have been trained in 18 months' time. In Miami there are 100 former pilots of Cubana Airlines who know the geography of Cuba as they know the wrinkles of their hand, ready and willing to fly supplies to forces in the hills. There are 500 officers of Castro's old 26th of July forces here—all of them eager to use against him the same guerrilla tactics they used to overthrow Batista. And here in Miami alone are 1,000 fishermen in exile, men who know every reef and rock and island in Cuban waters. All of them are here—fighting men, officers, pilots, sailors. All of them unused, all rotting in despair."

On a boat tied up in the Miami River, an old fisherman with a face the color of mahogany, nodded in agreement.

"Surely," he said in the accents of his native Jamaica, "I could go and come free as a bird if those people there"—he nodded vaguely toward the shore—"would just look the other way. I know the waters on both coasts of Cuba. I know the bays, the little islands, the hiding places. I ran guns into Cuba against Batista." He rubbed the smooth rail of the sturdy boat. "This boat took 80 tons of rifles and ammunition to the north coast at the time of the Bay of Pigs. And now I just sit here and wait."

Many another Cuban has not been content to wait. In his haste to demonstrate his defiance of U.S. restraints—and his patriotism—he goes lurching off on expeditions that are almost ludicrously inept. Small planes, carrying home-made explosives, sneak in on haphazard raids. Boats that would hardly be safe in the quiet waters of Biscayne Bay set out for

the rough journey across the often turbulent Florida Straits—and their crews are found, bailing frantically, a few miles from shore. Expeditions have set out without water, without enough gasoline, with boxes of ammunition for guerrilla carbines—but with no clips by which the cartridges can be inserted.

"It seems to me that some of these people want to get caught," one Coast Guard officer said. "They talk so much that everybody in Florida knows what they are going to do."

There is much truth in this. The Cuban is capable of performing acts of great derring-do, but he finds it almost impossible to keep his mouth shut. If he carries out a bold raid, he holds a press conference. If he plans a daring act, and is caught before it can get under way, he boasts of this too, so that all may



MISSION A FLOP, HE BURIES GUNS IN FLORIDA. HE WAS JAILED RETRIEVING THEM.

know he is a man of valor.

"Seven times I have started out. Seven times I have been turned back," said one young Cuban, with a curious air of pride. "I," said his companion complacently, "am a two-time loser."

Some of the Cuban efforts to prepare themselves for operations within Cuba have about them an air of play-acting, of unreality. For the past two years a quartet of American adventurers, led by a gigantic ex-Marine and ex-Fidelista named Gerald Patrick Hemming, have been taking small groups of eager young Cubans to an isolated island called No Name Key, south of Miami, for the purpose of training them in guerrilla warfare.

There, often hungry and bitten by mosquitoes, the trainees sleep on the floor of a battered frame house once used as a fishing camp. By day they fire

Russian-made carbines, ordered through the mail, lunge at each other with wooden knives in simulated hand-to-hand combat, and practice judo. By night they crawl on their bellies through the mangrove thickets on "patrols." Food often runs out, and water is scarce.

Occasionally, when a television or news photographer will provide money for the rental of a plane, Hemming and a few of his companions will repair to an abandoned airfield in central Florida, where they demonstrate for the cameras how they expect to descend on Castro. Training for the jump consists of strapping a parachute on a nervous volunteer and showing him the ripcord handle. Not long ago a gaunt, hot-eyed young Cuban named Victor Velez, a one-time member of the "Dragons" gang in New York City, froze with fright on his first jump. "Push me! Push me!" he yelled as he stood in the door. His companions obligingly tore his clinging hands from the door and shoved him out. His leader, Oscar Pino, a sad-eyed, ascetic, deeply religious man who never smokes or drinks, heard of Velez's feat with approval. "We want only men who are not afraid to die," he said.

The Cubans who come to No Name Key for this sketchy, hazardous training are a widely varied lot, many of whom were born in this country and have never seen the island. One of a recent cadre was a chubby, soft-muscled draftsman whose last job was drawing the plans for the air-conditioning system in a new skyscraper in New York. Another was a grinder of optical lenses. A third, called *El Infante*, was so young he'd never held a job. He was made camp cook.

Some 200 Cubans have been "trained" at No Name Key. Once they have finished their creeping and crawling, or have been driven back to Miami by hunger and mosquitoes, the Americans lose contact with them. "Some of them may go on a raid or two," says one of Hemming's companions, a man known only as Davey, "or try it and get caught. Most of them, I guess, just get a job and forget about it."

U.S. officials have long known about the "training" that went on on No Name Key and have chosen to ignore it, considering it a harmless escape valve for the Cubans' desire for *acción*.

"We don't give a damn how much they crawl around on their bellies down there," said one. "But if they try to leave for Cuba, that's different. We'll stop them."

To Cubans such as Oscar Pino, this policy makes no sense. Neutrality laws mean nothing to them when the fate of

their country is at stake, nor can they emotionally accept the fact that Cuba is only one small pawn on the great chessboard of our global diplomacy. Their policy toward Castro and Communism can be summed up in the one word, "guerra"—war.

"We do not ask the U.S. to rescue Cuba," says Fernando Rocha, blue-eyed, handsome leader of a student group called D.R.E. "We do not ask for the U.S. Marines. Castro and Communism are a Cuban problem, and it must be solved by Cubans. All we ask is help, a pat on the back instead of the hand of a cop on the shoulder. We don't understand this policy of restraint. All we ask is the same help that Russia openly gives to Castro—one tenth the help that the U.S. gives to South Vietnam. Give us that help. Then let us fight."

"OK, we are agreed," says one American official. "We want Castro out of there. So why not help the exiles do the job? But, once you mount that toboggan, how do you get off? First, they need money for boats and gasoline, and short-wave radios for communications. Then guns and ammunition and the demolition stuff. Pretty soon there's a little shooting going on nearly everywhere, and a rebellion starts before it's ready.

"Then Castro moves in to put it down. What do we do then? Obviously we'd have to go in there with all we've got, for we couldn't stand ashamed before the world while another Hungary died on our doorstep. There's another consideration: If Castro were suddenly shot out of the saddle, what would we do when civil war broke out among all the 'patriot' factions that would start fighting each other? And what about Khrushchev? If American troops started shooting Soviet soldiers in Cuba, would Russians start shooting Americans in Berlin?"

The Cuban exiles are profoundly impressed by this appraisal. They argue that any policy of moderation toward Castro and Communism proves that the Government of the United States lacks *machismo*, meaning maleness—courage, audacity, power and the willingness to use it. "President Kennedy predicts that Castro will fall within five years," says (Nestor Carbonel,) Harvard-educated spokesman for the old Revolutionary Council, now cut off from United States support. "Five years will be too late. Even two years will be too late. By then all of Cuba will be one vast underground fortress, vulnerable only to a nuclear bomb. By then nearly seven million Cubans will have lost all hope of help

from the outside. Cuban children will be converted into brain-washed robots.†

The exiled Cubans' disenchantment with our policy began shortly after the Bay of Pigs. The exiles' reaction to that tragic fiasco was the same as that of most Americans—a mixture of anger, humiliation and bewilderment. A few months after the debacle, however, in all the little restaurants of southwest Miami, small groups of patriots again were plotting hopefully over their coffee cups.

Their idea was to move in progressive stages. First, to restore contact with what was left of the underground. Second, to strengthen and protect the underground by enlisting sympathizers in the militia and the army. Third, to create new guerrilla forces, and to provide them with arms and supplies. Sabotage teams would be organized to blow up oil refineries, telephone exchanges, factories of all descriptions. Once the campaign of sabotage was well under way, and Castro's internal communications and transportation had been paralyzed, then the raids from outside could begin.

All they wanted from the U.S. was "help," meaning money, and a few tough men in green berets from the U.S. Special Forces, to train leaders in the techniques of guerrilla war. Plus, of course, whatever odds and ends of war-surplus boats and weapons might be lying about. To obtain these things, they turned to the only Americans they knew, the CIA, the men they had known as "The Company" or "Los Amigos" when the Bay of Pigs invasion was being organized. *Los Amigos* listened sympathetically. But as for money to promote violence within Cuba—sorry.

"They sought to pay us money to do nothing, to sit in an office and talk," one Cuban leader complained bitterly. "They did not help us. They sought to discourage us. They told us that Fidel's spies would infiltrate our movement."

Without active U.S. help, what could be done was little enough. A few boats began to go in quietly, carrying food, medicine, shoes—bribes to buy the loyalty of the sick and hungry. Inside Cuba, however, pressure for more drastic action began to build. Couriers began bringing out elaborate plans for sabotage.

"Look," said one slim Cuban, his black eyes hot with anger, "here is the layout of a glass factory. It shows where the machines are placed, how they function, the place to put the explosive to destroy it all. Here are the names of the directors and foremen, with a character analysis of each, the ones we must be wary of, the ones we can count on for help. Here is the request for explosives. 500 pounds in 25-pound pieces. It is a perfect plan. I go to the CIA and explain

to them. They still say, 'No, No, No.'

Despite the rejection by the CIA, the efforts went on. Men sold their blood to hospitals to raise money to buy rifles and C-3, an explosive so powerful that a matchbox full will disable a truck. Occasionally the jealous, bickering groups would help each other, an indication that if there were some strong, centrally directed action against Castro, they all would cooperate. Now and then groups would pool their resources in a joint operation, one furnishing the boat; another, gasoline; a third, arms and high explosives. Everybody wanted to get into the act, for there was politics, as well as patriotism and personal pride involved in these operations.

"Every one of these guys," said an American observer, "is running for President of Cuba."

Manuel Artime has another explanation: "Once Castro is overthrown, there will be only two kinds of Cubans. Those who fought him and those who were afraid to fight. Those who did not fight can never go home."

Soon it became clear that the desperate makeshift operations, quietly carried out, were doing little to raise the spirits of those inside Cuba. The letters coming out still were begging desperately for more drastic action. Nor did the clandestine operations open the pocketbooks of wealthy Cubans, who many times had financed "quiet" operations which they later had reason to suspect had never come off at all. Obviously some spectacular deed was needed that would be given wide publicity.

The first "psychological raid" came last August, when the students made a bold foray into Havana harbor to shoot up a waterfront hotel. The result was gratifying. It proved to the Cuban people that they were not forgotten, that Castro's island fortress, with its Russian guns and Russian soldiers, was not invulnerable. In Cuba, the people responded to the raid with a flurry of sabotage, the students reported. In Miami, morale among the exiles soared, and the students walked the streets as heroes.

Raid on a British ship

The implications of this raid were not lost on a tall, dour Cuban named Antonio Veciana, political leader of a group calling itself Alpha 66. Veciana was a "polemic" character, in the Cuban phrase, a figure of controversy whose motives and loyalties, to some Cuban refugees, were suspect. A spectacular raid, Veciana obviously felt, would improve

his image. In September his action group, led by the big, calm Cuban named Tony Cuesta, slipped into the port of Isabela de Sagua and put a few shells from a Finnish cannon through the superstructure of a British ship.¶

Before Veciana could harvest the fruits of Cuesta's action on a money-raising tour, the October crisis came. The U.S., which had been looking the other way, now barred any operations that might disrupt the tense negotiations. With Khrushchev's backdown on the missiles, however, the exiles were jubilant. Hopefully they awaited word that they would be turned loose to strike. From as far away as Hawaii, exiled Cubans poured into Miami, ready to fight. Instead, the restraints remained. Soon the negotiations for the return of the Bay of Pigs prisoners were on, and it was obvious to even the most impatient patriots that this was no time to stir Castro's wrath.

By the end of December, however, the prisoners were safely home, and Mr. Kennedy had made his famous welcoming speech to them in the Orange Bowl, where he promised that the flag that had flown over the Bay of Pigs would fly again over a free Havana. "We are reborn," an exultant old man yelled.

To their bitter disappointment, the hopeful exiles soon learned that Mr. Kennedy was working on a timetable different from their own. They were thinking of war tomorrow. He was thinking of quieter and slower methods.

¶ The more impatient Cubans were not content with quiet methods. From a base in the Bahamas, on the night of March 17, one faction of the Alpha group struck a Soviet freighter, the *Zvov*, lying at anchor at Isabela de Sagua. Damage was negligible. According to underground reports,

the raiding boat had fired from about 800 yards, hitting the ship's smokestack with a few 20-mm cannon shells. The publicity, however, was fabulous. Khrushchev reacted with a most satisfying roar, and our State Department sternly denounced such flea-bite operations. Veciana was overjoyed. Setting out on a fund-raising tour of the Eastern Seaboard, he found exultant Cubans eager to thrust funds upon him. In Augusta, Ga., exiled Cuban doctors gave him \$1,800 to buy two motors for his raiding boats. In Atlanta exiles pledged \$10,000 in support of the 20 raids he promised would follow.¶

¶ To the less publicity-minded men of the old Alpha this raid was a challenge to their *machismo*. Now calling themselves "Commandos L," they roared by speedboat into the harbor at Caibarién on the night of March 26, firing three

NATO rifles and a 20-mm Finnish cannon at a Soviet freighter, the *Baku*.¶

¶ "The ship was all alight, and as we fired we could hear the Russian sailors running and shouting," said Tony Cuesta. "We had a homemade mine, of 50 pounds of TNT, which we placed against the hull. We were only 100 yards away when the explosion came."¶

¶ The explosion tore a 13-foot hole in the *Baku's* hull and the intruding waters ruined 10,000 sacks of sugar, Moscow announced. It also tore, beyond repair, the already strained relations between the exiled Cubans and the U.S. Government. While Khrushchev demanded damages, and threatened to take steps to protect his ships, Mr. Kennedy sternly warned the exiles that the U.S. could not allow itself to become involved in incidents that might lead to counteraction against American ships and forces. Full-scale repressive measures went into effect. Known raiders were given notice that if they left the confines of Dade County they would be jailed, and the assorted exile-watchers redoubled their efforts.¶

¶ There the situation rests, uneasily, today. In the greatest sea hunt since the submarine patrols of World War II, the U.S. keeps watch throughout the Caribbean. The angry exiles, still determined to fight, pore over coffee-stained charts, hunting some safe haven where neither the U.S., the British, nor Castro can harass them. The charts hold out slim hope. The islands off Yucatán are near—"but Castro's people are already there." The Dominican Republic? "Too many Communists are already there." Guatemala? Honduras? Here their eyes light up. But these places are too far away for fast night-raiding small boats.¶

Thus the dilemma remains. The exiles' great potential—their courage, patriotism, knowledge of the country and the language—is still unused because we have found no way to use it without running the risk of war. The pin-prick raids have been outlawed, and there is little likelihood that policy will be changed. There is still work, however, that brave men could do—as they were doing in small independent groups before the suppression came. It is the silent, dangerous work of organizing an underground.

This, however, would require that the jealous leaders of the bickering factions swallow their pride and work in unity for the common good; that the men who make the forays into Cuba should do so quietly, without coming back to boast of their great deeds; that the unified exile groups should agree to accept not only "help" but guidance from the United States. But that, unfortunately, is not the Cuban way.

THE END

Why can't we get rid of Castro?

"The Cuban revolution has failed," *Post* contributing editor Edward Behr reports in this week's issue. By that, he means that the Communists have proved once again their almost miraculous talent for making a bad situation worse, for wrecking an economy and enslaving a people. What has not failed, however, is the establishment of Communist power in the Caribbean. Although the Kennedy Administration understandably enjoys taking credit for getting Nikita Khrushchev's missiles out of Cuba last October, it understandably prefers to gloss over the fact that Soviet power today is more firmly entrenched off our shores than it was a year ago. There are some 15,000 Soviet troops in Cuba—enough to "suppress any internal rebellion" or "to offer severe opposition to any attack."

That judgment comes from a recent report by the Senate Preparedness Investigation Subcommittee, which raises an even more sinister question: Did these missiles really leave? The senators admit they don't know. They also acknowledge that top U.S. intelligence officials, "to a man," hold to "their opinion that all strategic missiles and bombers have been removed from Cuba." But the senators add that the intelligence chiefs "readily admit that, in terms of absolutes, it is quite possible that offensive missiles remain on the island concealed in caves or otherwise. They also admitted that . . . based on skepticism, if nothing more, there is reason for grave concern about the matter."

The senators, who cite "several substantial errors" by U.S. intelligence in the past, sound as though they are pretty skeptical and pretty concerned. So are we. We've talked to a lot of Cuban refugees, who have sometimes been more accurate than the intelligence chiefs, and one of them flatly insisted that he'd seen hidden missiles on the Communist island as recently as last November. "Russian missiles are in Cuba," he said. "I know so." Where? "Maybe if you look in the caves in Pinar del Río . . ."

We can't look in the caves, but the Central Intelligence Agency can, and it's about time that its agents find out for certain what's going on in Cuba. To leave the Communists in a position to threaten us again with missiles from Cuba is clearly intolerable. But missiles are not the whole story. Even if the Soviets have no missiles in Cuba, they have troops and armor—and the political position that goes with military presence. The Administration indicates that "quiet diplomacy" is getting the Soviets to reduce their troops. A reduction is not enough. We suspect

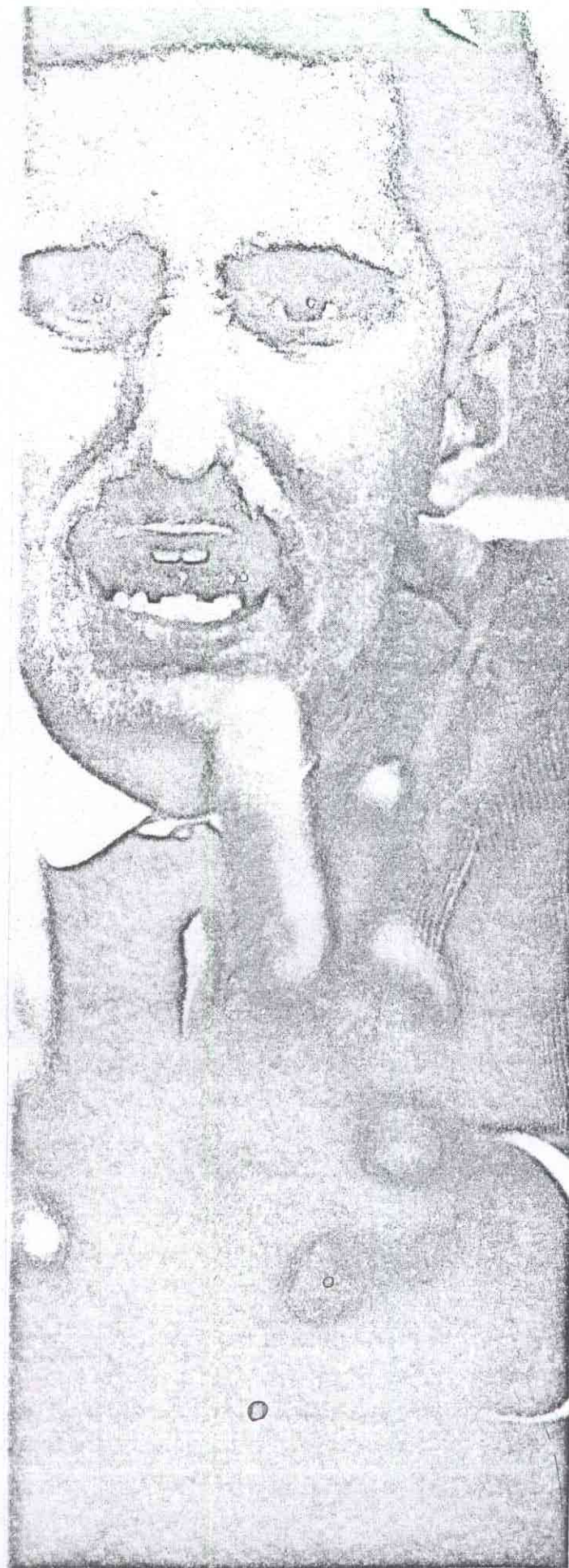
the Soviets plan to keep troops in Cuba indefinitely, and we think that even one Soviet soldier in the Western Hemisphere is one too many. Instead of just quiet diplomacy, we think Mr. Kennedy should use his well-known skill at quiet arm-twisting.

Getting rid of the Soviet troops isn't the whole story either. For as long as Castro rules Cuba, he will be maintaining a political beachhead for Communism in Latin America—a beachhead that he's trying to expand by subversion, propaganda and terrorism. That is why Nikita Khrushchev welcomed his bearded protégé in Moscow recently with such a lugubrious display of kissing and hugging. The two of them had a high old time swapping toasts, shooting ducks, ogling ballerinas at the Bolshoi and inspecting the missiles rolling through Red Square. On a shopping tour, Castro considered buying a belt but then remembered that he had forgotten to bring money. Khrushchev, who supports Castro's regime with \$500 million a year, soon settled that: "I can guarantee his credit."

But can he? President Kennedy repeatedly says that he is applying economic pressure on Castro, but it seems clear that he's not applying enough. As Behr's report makes clear, Cuba today is in disastrous shape, and yet it's still permitted to do business with unscrupulous businessmen in Canada and Western Europe. The oil that Castro needs keeps flowing in. Surely it's not impossible for the United States Government to find means of tightening its embargo, and keep tightening it.

And finally there are the refugees—a quarter of a million of them. We'll grant that a lot of them are wild-eyed and ineffectual, as Harold Martin reports on page 28, and that their hit-or-miss bombing raids don't do much damage to Castro's fortress. But Castro's fortress won't collapse all by itself either. The Cuban refugees remember one successful guerrilla who landed in Cuba with nothing more than one small boatload of seasick amateurs—and that was Castro himself. Organizing a rebellion against a dictator is a long, slow process, but it can and should be done. Why aren't we doing it?

[Back in 1960 a prominent American political figure expressed very similar views. "We must attempt to strengthen the . . . democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far, those fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our Government." That was true when Sen. John F. Kennedy said it. Isn't it true today?]



ANTONIO VECIANA MAKES FUND RAISING SPEECHES—AND RAIDS.