

## EATHERLY

"He is a nihilist," repeated Arkady.

"A nihilist," said Nikolai Petrovich. "That comes from the Latin *nihil*, *nothing*, as far as I can judge; the word must mean a man who . . . who recognizes nothing?"

"Say—who respects nothing," interposed Pavel Petrovich and lowered his knife with the butter on it.

"Who regards everything from the critical point of view," said Arkady.

"Isn't that exactly the same thing?" asked Pavel Petrovich.

"No, it's not the same thing. A nihilist is a person who does not bow down to any authority, who does not accept any principle on faith, however much that principle may be revered."

"Well, and is that good?" asked Pavel Petrovich.

"That depends, uncle dear. For some it is good, for others very bad."

Turgenev, *Fathers and Children*

FROM MISSISSIPPI EATHERLY proceeded to New Orleans to work for a company that was supposedly engaged in extracting mahogany logs from Central American jungles with surplus military weapons. There did seem to be something shady about the Marsalis Construction Company. When he was settled into the aristocratic Jung Hotel on Canal Street, Eatherly telephoned Gordon Jordan, who was going into the crop-dusting business upstate, and told him he had something hot. Jordan came on down.

The two hellions were a brief stroll from the strip joints of the French Quarter where girls parade naked on the bars for the

tourists. Eatherly was the kind of man women pause on the streets to gaze at, a taut 150 pounds, quick of motion, with penetrating green eyes and a knowing smile, twenty-eight years old. Jordan recalls that one evening Frank Sinatra was in town for a première: Jordan and Eatherly stepped out of a car in front of the St. Charles Hotel and girls started towards Eatherly crying out, "Frankiel!"

Eatherly gambled some, but his luck was changing. Once, suckered into betting on colors at a dime a chance, "before he could bat an eye he was down \$200," Jordan says. Though from all accounts Eatherly was quiet, even seclusive, in New Orleans, where the bars and the dancing were there in the evenings he was.

The friends' business associates would be incredible in a novel. The brains of the operation was wizened little George Rappleyea, "The Professor," an intellectual but a sharp dresser who had proved his facility for manipulating events in the 1920s by feinting John Scopes, the Dayton, Tennessee, public school teacher, into becoming the scapegoat of the famous "monkey trial." Disapproving of a new state law prohibiting the teaching of evolution in public schools, Rappleyea invited young Scopes to a place where he then provoked an argument on evolution. Scopes arrived, Rappleyea asked him what he thought, and the poor fellow was trapped: of course he believed in evolution. To make a test case, Scopes reluctantly consented to let Rappleyea have him arrested for violating the law. Later, when the whole town, Clarence Darrow, William Jennings Bryan, and the rest of the country were involved, Rappleyea defended evolution at a mass meeting, and a barber bit him.

After the trial the Professor abandoned these ingrates and went to New Orleans<sup>1</sup>; from 1928 on he worked for Higgins Industries, which makes boats. He wrote a book on open boat navigation and applied it on a trip up the Orinoco. During the Second World War he was a vice-president at Higgins, training men in navigation and taking care of plant security. He became chummy with "The Saint," A. R. St. Phillip, a Higgins guard captain who had a deep scar down the side of his face. In 1946 Rappleyea quit Higgins to sell boats and, he said, to enter a

<sup>1</sup> Ray Ginger, *Six Days or Forever?* Beacon Press, 1958.

partnership with Guy Lombardo, the orchestra leader. In 1947 the Professor and the Saint turned up as secretary-treasurer and vice-president, respectively, of Marsalis Construction Company, Incorporated.

The president was former Lt. Col. William I. Marsalis, "aeronautical adviser, Jackson, Mississippi," a pilot, promoter, inventor and gay blade. The son of a good family, he had joined the Army Air Corps in 1928. He met Eatherly and Jordan in the 393rd at Fairmount. When Eatherly was stationed at Biloxi, Marsalis offered him a job, and he accepted.

Eatherly's title was "supervisor of planes," or "chief pilot," or maybe both. He was paid \$500 a month and expenses, and there was to be a bonus later. Ostensibly his job was to supervise maintenance of some surplus two-engine P-38 fighter planes and fly one around later taking aerial photographs. Actually he was the chief among four pilots who were to bomb military points near Havana and touch off a Cuban revolution for which the Marsalis group was also providing pistols, rifles, submachine guns, ammunition, hand grenades, landing craft, armored cars, Sherman tanks, and a band of men recruited in New Orleans to do anything for \$50 a day and expenses. Spinning away from the tragedy of atomic warfare, Eatherly had plunged into the tragicomic opera of Latin-American revolution.

Those years, South and Central American governments could still be had for the price of an assassination and the loyalty of the military officers. Graft was the rule and guns the rulers. A concession to the sugar, or the coffee, or the fruit interests was the peace treaty, and more the cabinet members deponeth not.

The president of Cuba in 1947, Ramon Grau San Martin, was a left-wing nationalist whom Sergeant-Dictator Fulgencio Batista had made head of state in 1933, but removed when the U.S. refused to recognize the Grau government, apparently on grounds that it was too radical. Grau ran against Batista for president in 1940 and lost, but in 1944, when Batista could not run again legally, Grau won. Grau's period was characterized by moderate social progress, rake-offs, and a struggle between communists and noncommunists for control of the Cuban labor movement. He welcomed communist leaders to his Palace and

dealt with them as with other politicians. He tried to keep the labor movement, communist and noncommunist, united.

To Eatherly the politics of the matter was simple: Cuba was communist. "Back in 1947 down in Central America," he says, "a lot of these countries had communist governments. I was approached by the Falange Party—that's Franco's—so I made a deal with 'em. Of course I guess maybe part of it was for money. It usually is," he says laughing. Jordan says he was told simply that Batista was the man behind the government and that Batista's wife was a communist.

The plot's financiers were rumored among the participants to be Spanish and Argentine fascists, U.S. investors hoping to make a fast buck on the arms, U.S. sugar interests, and people in Cuba, led by Cuban newspaper publisher Eugenio DeSosa, a small, polished man, mustachioed and continental, who wanted the ins out. Norman Stanbro, who rented a garage to the Marsalis group, says a syndicate that he heard included Argentine newspaper interests and American sugar interests put up the money. A musician and an industrialist are mentioned by some of the participants. One source even quotes Marsalis saying he spent an afternoon with Juan Peron of Argentina. Exactly where the money came from is unknown, but it is a fact that early in 1947 Rappleyea deposited in the Marsalis account two checks, one for \$13,000 and one for \$45,000, that were drawn by one José Mayorga, 1 Wall Street, New York, on a private bank, Brown Brothers-Harriman, 50 Wall Street, New York. Lester Zollars, one of the Marsalis pilots, remembers that "Rapp went up to New York a couple of times, and he bragged about going up to Wall Street." Zollars vaguely recalls that he heard that a band leader introduced Rappleyea to "this guy Mayorga," but Zollars wonders if Mayorga was not a code name for someone.

The plan ramified into Cuba, British Honduras, and Guatemala. Officially the company would acquire U.S. surplus military equipment to extract mahogany from British Honduran jungle. Meanwhile the expedition would be prepared on the Gulf Coast. When the moment came, ships bearing men, arms, and equipment would chug along the intracoastal canal to Venice, Florida, and obtain clearance to British Honduras. Abroad again, they

would rendezvous with another vessel and take on firearms; with welding equipment on board they would cut slits in some armor plate and secure it across their military vehicles in place of the turrets the government would have cut off. By night the pilots would fly four P-38s the 450 miles from Venice across the Straits of Florida to Havana and bomb bridges that connect Camp Cubano and Camp Columbia with Havana. "If we could'a blown both of them they'da had to swim," Jordan says. If they had any bombs left over, he says, they would "harass the troops." Since the Cuban Air Force was supposed to be friendly to the revolutionaries, the P-38s were then to land in Cuba, but neither Eatherly nor Jordan thought much of that.

All the navigational maps indicated a voyage to British Honduras except one to Cuba that was marked on the back, "not en route." Zollars was told that the flatbottom LCTs couldn't go into the open Gulf, so they would pass near Cuba. In fact they were to land on the Cuban coast, probably near the Miramar Yacht Club, ostensibly for fuel. The bombings accomplished, the boats would be "seized" and the arms and equipment unloaded—the revolution would be off in a panic, the ground forces milling inland wearing three-inch red, white, and blue armbands. "The Havana police force was supposed to have been bought. Some bunch of students were supposed to help us," Jordan says. So was the captain of a 128-man Cuban garrison. "The old man," apparently Grau, was to be spirited from the Palace in his nightshirt and wrapped in a blanket.

Belize, British Honduras, the supposed starting point of the mahogany operation, is another 450 miles from Havana by sea through the Yucatan Channel. Such imaginative filibusterers as Rappleyea, Marsalis, and Eatherly did not intend to waste their mobile expeditionary force on one country. Once finished in Havana, they could have proceeded to British Honduras for a second revolution there or in adjacent Guatemala, which Eatherly had visited on liberty in 1942-43. Eatherly says they intended to overthrow the governments of both Cuba and Guatemala. Stanbro remembers that one of the checks deposited to the Marsalis group account was drawn on a Guatemalan bank.

Eatherly says that politicians and high military officials became

involved in the plot. "The State Department through these senators told me, 'You go abroad and do this, but if you get caught, we're not gonna protect you,'" he says. Jordan says Rappleyea claimed they had the "sanction" of the State Department.

Just who was in charge in New Orleans is disputed now. Rappleyea seemed to be dispensing the funds. Marsalis was the president. Eatherly told two other pilots in the group he had been running things from the start; he says he was in charge of getting all the equipment. St. Phillip says Eatherly was one of four leaders (he being the fourth), but that Eatherly did not buy any of the major equipment. His former boss Rappleyea was the main man, St. Phillip says. Rappleyea turned up in Belize in January, ostensibly promoting the New Orleans group as an agricultural expeditionary force.

The Professor and Marsalis flew to Havana on November 16, 1946, Marsalis flying back to New Orleans November 21 and Rappleyea November 27. Selecting as unlikely a setting for dangerous intrigue as anyone could desire, a nondescript residential-commercial section of New Orleans, they rented half of a one-story plaster and red-brick duplexed commercial building at 3410 Magazine Street. The other half was vacant, with a sign, "Apply Next Door." Anyone who applied was told it was rented. On a wall inside the headquarters the plotters hung a large map of Havana and the north coast of Cuba, using pins to mark key points.

Marsalis went to Washington to talk the government into letting him buy some Sherman tanks. First he called at the office of his senator, James Eastland, but Courtland C. Pace, Eastland's administrative assistant, says testily that the senator "doesn't know anything about any gunrunning." Pace says Marsalis visited him, Pace, late in 1946 and said that with bulldozers in such short supply, he needed the tanks to push up stumps that would be crushed for turpentine. Pace thought this was a "terrific idea" and "showed he had some initiative," so, he says, he telephoned the Pentagon and "made an engagement for him" with the chief of Army Ordnance, Maj. Gen. Everett S. Hughes. The Army's records on the tank sales were destroyed six to eight years later. Eatherly says he bought ten or fifteen of them at the Red

River Arsenal at Texarkana, Texas. "They didn't ask me any questions," he says. "They'd cut the gun mounts off the tanks, I'd welded 'em back on." St. Phillip says Eatherly did not buy them. Jordan recalls that Eatherly bought the 50-caliber guns to arm them.

The U.S. Maritime Commission, which was disposing of thousands of surplus warships at bargain prices, approved the sale of two landing craft, tank (LCTs), to Marsalis Construction Co., Inc.—Col. Marsalis owner of 90 per cent of the stock—for \$10,000 each late in 1946. They were 119 feet long and 33 feet wide and weighed 400 tons, with a four-foot draft. Built like barges, with three engines and a deckhouse to one side, their front ends opened downwards for loading and unloading.

The Dutchman who owned 3410 Magazine, John Van Vranken, Sr., ran an old-style New Orleans bar on the corner a few doors away. It was a stand-up place with a mahogany bar 32 feet long, a steel foot railing, and a large mirror behind the bar. The men from 3410 used to drop in for a quick drink. Van Vranken remembers then ducking in and out of their office: "Three or four of 'em, you know, they'd go in there for meetings like, you know. They would come unbeknownst to me, and they would go unbeknownst to me."

Stanbro leased the group his Highway Garage in Gulfport, Mississippi, a pleasure town upcoast from New Orleans. In the morning, lines of shadow like black netting waver across the dark blue Gulf. Moored in the harbor are cruisers and fishing craft, white and aqua and gala green, gleaming or splintery, varnished and chromed or rust dripping from weak spots in salt-eaten hulls. White sailboats scud smartly before the breeze.

In 1947, 20,000 people lived in the town. Stanbro, a craggily good-looking man of English and French extraction, says a local real estate agent proposed that he rent to the company, which he understood to be "out of Maryland," and after checking with a banker, he said all right. Rappleyea arrived and told him they were going to raise mahogany logs that had been sawed and sunk in a Central American river. Together they went to the bank and deposited \$50,000, which was enough to convince everybody in Gulfport. "They spent a tremendous amount of money here,"

Stanbro says. "They had charge accounts all over. They were gilt-edge."

Stanbro knew who Eatherly was, because Marsalis "told me that he was a hot pilot and he was one of the men who dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. We've got the best that money can buy," he quotes Marsalis. Eatherly met Stanbro while delivering to him some .38 and .45 pistols, Italian Berettas, and two magnum pistols he had picked up from Texas shops. "He was a very quiet man, polished, very reserved," Stanbro says. "Very abrupt. It was strictly business. Very tight-lipped. Of course in this business I guess he had to be. He was not one of those who went out to the taverns with Marsalis. He was a part of it, but he was alone. He never associated with any of the men who got in this thing. He made an appearance when he had to and he was gone. He was a man you respected—he was high caliber."

In New Orleans, too, the Saint found Eatherly "not necessarily secretive, but on the quiet side." No wonder, their game was so bold. Jordan and Eatherly bought about \$4,000 worth of small arms from a New Orleans shop where Eatherly also cashed his checks. (Jordan never let his name get on a payroll list.) "We told 'em a far-fetched tale we were going to put up a shooting gallery somewhere between New Orleans and Biloxi. We were buying thirty-ought-sixties!" Jordan says.

Smith and Wesson pistols, sawed-off shotguns, and Winchester lever action rifles arrived in Gulfport new from factories, air express for Marsalis. "We had 'em by the carloads," Stanbro says. He saw heavy Signal Corps walkie-talkie systems, heavy beam searchlights, half a dozen four-wheel drive Army trucks, three fully armored half-tracks, and six Sherman tanks with the turrets cut off. He used a heavy winch to unload the tanks from two flatcars. They had new Diesel engines, but some of the armor had been penetrated by shells. For a time they were left out in the open, plain as day, in the yard at the Highway Garage inside the city limits of Gulfport.

Stanbro says he was gulled by the talk about mahogany. One day, though, he drew a line, of sorts: he would *not* store cases of high explosive gelatin at his garage. It happened he owned a concrete block house on the bank of Bayou Bernard, where Turkey



Creek runs in seven or eight miles from the Bay of Biloxi. He suggested the loggers rent this place, too, and move the gelatin there. They did; then they had a real hideout. It was set back 120 feet from the bayou in a stand of loblolly slash pine. Since the bayou had been dredged to thirty feet right up to the bank, they could bring the LCTs around through the bay, as one native remembers them doing, and dock there. Two sergeants were recruited from Keesler Field to make the bombs there, Stanbro says. They devised a radial bomb of three two-inch black pipes thirty inches long, stuffed with the gelatin. The shell cases were made openly in a New Orleans machine shop.

The P-38s had twin fuselages and tails. The nose, shaped like a seed, jutted forward from the wing that joined the two bodies. Eatherly says the group had about thirty of them, but this estimate is implausibly higher than the others. Jordan thinks they had five, each costing \$1,500 to \$3,500; Zollars, who bailed out of one of them, believes there were six (and then five). The government has no records on the sales. In any event, four were to bomb Havana. Jordan recalls the Professor asking him and Eatherly whether, in addition to the three bombs that would be tied to the underbelly of each P-38, they could carry a few along in their cockpits and just throw them down on their targets. They wondered if he was some kind of nut and told him there was barely enough room in there for the pilot.

On January 30, 1947, two LCTs were delivered to the Marsalis group at Lake Charles, Louisiana; thence they were steered upcoast and into the harbor at Gulfport. Three days later this urgent want ad appeared in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune*:

WANTED—Crews, ex-service men with experience on L.C.T. 105-footers, Captains, mates, engineers. Apply by letter, telegram, phone, or in person, Marsalis Construction Co., 3410 Magazine St. UP 8686

Zollars remembers seeing Eatherly interviewing the applicants at New Orleans. As the freebooters began arriving at Gulfport, Stanbro noticed that "they had nobody less than a captain. They had frogmen—it was majors and captains and colonels. It was all brass."

Obviously these doings were costing a lot of cash, and one Saturday just after midnight, Stanbro saw some of it. Marsalis flew in from New Orleans and met him in Merchants' Café for a cup of coffee, after which they adjourned to Marsalis' room in the old Great Southern Hotel. From a thick copy of the Sunday *Times-Picayune* he was carrying, Marsalis withdrew a large number of bills. Stanbro remembers very well:

Marsalis: "Here Stan, give me a hand—help me count this stuff."

Stanbro: "Okay."

Silently they thumbed it out, all five hundred and one thousand dollar bills. It came to seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars.

Stanbro: "That's a lot of dough, boy."

Marsalis: "That's no dough at all compared to what's back of this outfit."

The prize was 600 miles away, across the Gulf. Two years before, Eatherly had killed time in Havana between training flights in the "Straight Flush." In mid-February, 1947, he returned there to rent a house and three apartments, each one strategically located: three docks from the Miramar Yacht Club . . . two kilometers from the Havana Yacht Club near the river bridge . . . near the National Hotel . . . near the President's Palace. (Jordan says they needed the roof of one of the apartment buildings for submachine guns.) Before Eatherly left, he and the Professor dined with DeSosa. He says he also wined and dined some Cuban officers in Havana, stirring up trouble for the government. Stone drunk one night in his room at the Presidente Hotel, he was apparently arrested by four gendarmes, but as they were friendly to him, he "escaped" and was hidden out in a Havana brothel. DeSosa was entering a black six-year-old named Betty's Beau in the \$25,000 New Orleans Handicap at the Fair Grounds, and it is possible Eatherly slipped out of the country in the plane carrying the horse to New Orleans.

The Saturday of February 22, a blue fall day, DeSosa, Rappleyea, Eatherly, Jordan, and (Jordan remembers) "a Cuban ambassador or envoy or somethin'" mingled with the largest crowd in Fair Grounds history, nursing not only their revolution-

ary scheme, but a secret for the day, the dope Jordan says he and Eatherly brought for Betty's Beau. Eatherly told Jordan that DeSosa agreed that day that the two of them would train the Cuban Air Force: "Eatherly told him he and I wanted a job training the Air Force, and he said 'Oh yes, we'd have to have that.' Eatherly said he wanted \$50,000 a year to do it. He said . . . DeSosa didn't bat an eye; he wish'd he'd said \$100,000. Hell, they'd probably have cut our heads off!"

In the Handicap, DeSosa's nag ran last in a field of eight, an omen for the fantastic plot that now quickened to its denouement. That Saturday's *Times-Picayune* carried another want ad from Marsalis, Inc., this time for six ex-servicemen, "M-10 tank drivers, to operate commercial tank dozers." When Eatherly returned from a gun-buying trip to Dallas, Jordan, St. Phillip, and he were given the job, Jordan says, of seeing to the hiring of 500 veterans who would do whatever was called for. They went to a coffee shop at the French Market and made the arrangements with a man who "look' like the kinda fella who would cut your throat for little or nothing."

Eatherly and Jordan were to fly two of the fighter-bombers. On Thursday, Zollars said, Eatherly asked him and William Flowers, another Marsalis pilot, "How would you like to make a little side money?" He said that Cuba was dominated by "Reds and communists" and that they were going to fly there from Venice about 2 A.M., drop bombs, and fly back.

Zollars is grateful to Eatherly for leveling with them when Rappleyea was still insisting they were lumberjacks and chickle extractors. "He said we were going down over Havana and drop some flash bulbs and some pop bombs just to scare things up. We weren't gonna do any damage," Zollars remembers. Eatherly also told them, Zollars says, that they were to be paid \$5,000 each for a couple of hours' work—a sum which some incredulous secretary or bureaucrat has changed to \$50.00 in official records. (Jordan says he and Eatherly were to get \$10,000 each.) "We didn't believe Eatherly, and that was our mistake," Zollars says.

The same day two LCTs flying Nicaraguan flags moved from Gulfport to the shell pile at Mississippi City. Special permission having been obtained from the Mississippi Highway Depart-

ment, two tanks trundled down the open highway on rubber treads and rolled on to the LCTs. Probably then the LCTs moved out to the Gulf and anchored. A. E. Kremer, owner of Kremer Marine Works at Handsboro, a few miles inland on Bayou Bernard, says that one of his mechanics had to go out to them in a small boat to fix an engine:

"They went down the hatch and it was all dark like and then through a little room, and he said it was all dark in there, and after a while he saw these fellas all lined up in the bunks and nobody said nothin'. They musta been told not to. He got the engine fixed . . . He come back and says, 'Boy, that's a spooky outfit. Nobody said nothin'."

The night of February 27, six .45 calibre Harrington & Richardson Reising submachine guns were delivered to the house on Bayou Bernard. Jordan says Eatherly and he took them over in Jordan's car, but Stanbro remembers they came in a truckload of arms that also included hand grenades and tear gas bombs in bushel baskets. When he heard about the submachine guns, Stanbro finally became alarmed: he went to the Bayou house and spent the night with them, as though that would help somehow. He figures that, except for dead bodies, the two hottest items a man can have are a thousand-dollar bill and a machine gun, and he had seen both. In the morning his wife drove out to warn him that the Federal Bureau of Investigation was moving in. He at once decided that the Federal Bureau of Investigation should be notified and sent her to call them from a service station. "Before she got back," he says, "I had the Sheriff's office, I had the F.B.I., I had the Alcohol Tax (that's Internal Revenue), I had the Border Patrol, Coast Guard, every branch of the law there. I wasn't worried, I wasn't involved in it."

Marsalis and Alfred Sage, an associate of Marsalis, were arrested in Gulfport; Rappleyea and St. Phillip at 3410. A secretary, slipping out of 3410 for coffee, called and warned Eatherly and Jordan. Jordan remembers their return to their hotel room:

"The room was locked where we couldn't get in. When we walked up and tried to get in, they come in and arrested him. They'd been hiding there in the stairwell.

"This F.B.I. man wanted to see Eatherly's I.D. Eatherly went

to reach in his pocket for identification—and this city detective went for his gun on his hip. I thought he was gonna shoot him before we got him calmed down. Eatherly said I was a friend visitin' him. They never arrested me.”

One source says a key man on one of the LCTs was working for the F.B.I. Eatherly says he knew they would finally get caught, but, he says, “I just didn't give a damn.”

Sunday in New Orleans the news was front page. In a three-column picture, also showing the Saint, the Professor, and a detective, Eatherly was customarily natty in topcoat and tie. He was identified in the story as “Major Claude R. Eatherly, who said he was a member of an escort plane in the atomic bomb flight against Hiroshima.” All five men arrested were charged with conspiracy to violate the national firearms act and released on bond.

Five federal agencies were involved—the F.B.I., the State Department, Customs, the alcohol tax unit, and the Coast Guard—but for a while, as Stanbro says, they didn't know who was who. The government later contended that two days after the arrests Marsalis and St. Phillip withdrew a check to cash for \$22,000 from the Marsalis account in Gulfport, which therefore was presumably unknown to the government. Jordan says that the investigators didn't even find the map on the wall at 3410 showing the Cuban plan—“I don't know whether they were just stupid or what”—and that news stories indicated they thought British Honduras or Guatemala was the target. One perspicacious agent had concluded, however, that “Something, something was about to happen.” With Rappleyea saying that the weapons were for “hunting in South America,” Eatherly that they were “for protection of the men on the job,” and other culprits spinning yarns that the planes were for aerial photography, the armor plate for tool boxes, the bombs for blasting trees into the river, and the LCTs for picking them up, little wonder that when customs seized the two LCTs they alleged they were about to be exported to Nicaragua!

A few days after the arrests, four more cut-away gun carriers arrived in Gulfport aboard two flat cars. Stanbro says one LCT, Eatherly says three, sailed off before the arrests. Eatherly

says ten or fifteen tanks had been bought; he may have been including the half-tracks. Stanbro saw six tanks; the government found only two. Eatherly says the government sold twenty planes, but there are records of the sale of only four; perhaps one or two were slipped through the government's net. Marsalis boasted later he had another one in California and was going to set a speed record in it.

By March 12 the government had divined the plan for a Cuban invasion. Special investigators, Naval intelligence and Coast Guard officers, city detectives, and F.B.I. and customs agents assembled in an office in the federal building in New Orleans and took statements from many people in the plot. At 8:37 P.M., Eatherly came into the room.

He was told at first, he said, that the bombs were to be used in construction work, and he thought they logically could be. One day, however, the Professor hinted about the revolution and said he would like Eatherly to drop the bombs. Eatherly said he was told they were to be used to cause confusion and not to kill people. He conceded he had invited Zollars and Flowers to join the fun; loyal to his friend, he did not mention Jordan. His conversation with DeSosa in Havana, he said, was purely social. He told about the places he rented and the targets of the revolutionaries' plans. He emphasized that he had bought only the guns in Dallas and New Orleans—never high explosives, nor did he even know about machine guns, tanks, and armor plate.

Some of the lawmen thought he was not telling all. The Saint believes he was not prosecuted, to the contrary, because he turned state's witness; Zollars concurs. Eatherly says he simply knew too much. The investigation was called off, he says, by President Truman. He says with good humor that of course he made money, but the government took it all away. "They robbed me of over a million dollars . . . I'd buy it [equipment] from 'em and then they took it back." He adds that it was the Falangists who took the beating when the government closed in.

Jordan agrees about the Falangists. "As it turned out, it was more or less the Falangist Party," he says. "I learned this from the F.B.I. After they didn't arrest me, I went and talked to them . . . They just said that it looked like it was Franco's party backing

it." *Hoy*, the communist paper in Cuba, speculated that DeSosa's role indicated Peron's interest. The paper also said that DeSosa, Peron, and a boat-maker were friends and, presumably trying to distract attention from the U.S. government's role in preventing the revolution, attacked the boatmaker's alleged influence with Truman, the State Department, the U.S. ambassador in Havana, and a senator.

Stanbro does not think the New Orleans group intended to take part in the revolution. "They were gunrunners in a big way," he says. "It was so much for each item that they landed . . . They were delivering the goods." He says Marsalis told him the motive of some of the backers was the buck—that a \$10 gun stateside was worth \$100 in Central America.

After the arrests, Stanbro says, Marsalis explained: "He had a chance to make a million bucks and why not make it instead of pumpin' gas for \$50 a week? . . . 'There it is layin' down right off the coast for the taking. If we landed with that equipment and beached it, we're not gonna have to fight a war. Wouldn't have to. A few firecrackers, a few bombs . . . You know how excitable they are down there.'"<sup>2</sup>

In November indictments were returned charging Marsalis, the Professor, and the Saint with feloniously conspiring to export arms and implements of war to British Honduras without a license from the State Department. Apparently State did not want the Cuban plot publicized. Stanbro says, "The government had 'em, but they didn't push it . . . I think the brains behind it *knew* they have the government involved." The three men pleaded guilty and each was sentenced to a year and a day in

<sup>2</sup> A graduate student, Louis R. Sadler, who has been doing research on this aborted adventure in connection with his doctoral dissertation at the University of South Carolina, has read my account of the matter and makes several helpful points. On the basis of his research, Sadler believes the target, after Cuba, may have been British Honduras. He also has found evidence that the company that ran the operation was incorporated in Delaware, only 200 men, not 500 as Jordan indicates, were hired for the band, and there were five fighter planes. In addition to the LCTs, Sadler came across records of two LCMs (also landing craft) that were ready for use in the operation. He says he is sure that Eatherly became a state's witness and thus avoided prosecution.

federal prison by a judge who commented that this was relatively light punishment. Eatherly had been called as a witness, but with the trial obviated, no one testified.

The conspirators had not so much placed themselves against the law as beyond it. In his attitudes, Eatherly was a harbinger of what was to happen in his nation. Combating violent communists, he became a violent anticommunist, just as these days, infected by the desperateness of the rebels they fear, even conservatives become incendiaries. The idea of respecting the government of Cuba meant no more to Eatherly in 1947 than it did to Fidel Castro in 1959 or to the Central Intelligence Agency in 1961. For that month or two, installing himself in his own court, Eatherly made his own law. After Hiroshima, why not?