

THE CUBAN INVASION: THE CHRONICLE OF A DISASTER
by TAD SZULC & KARL E. MEYER (BALLANTINE BOOKS, N.Y., 1962)

with only the slightest supervision. Mr. Dulles presided over the general outlines of the Cuban venture, but day-to-day responsibility was vested with Richard M. Bissell Jr., one of Dulles' three deputies. Bissell, a tall, dignified economist and one-time Marshall Plan official, was known for his scholarly discourse and for his success in developing the U-2 flights, an ingenious innovation that paid off handsomely until there was one flight too many. Both men had wide experience in intelligence work, but neither was ever deeply involved in Latin America—their backgrounds in intelligence and politics was mostly in Europe—and therefore neither had extended contact with the very special psychological conditions prevailing elsewhere in this hemisphere. And neither had ever commanded troops.

The actual handling of the Cuban problem in Washington was assigned to a retired army colonel in charge of the CIA's Latin American division, and then to his successor, also a former colonel, who had business experience in Latin America. It is not clear what the military command structure was in Washington and who actually bossed it.

The Miami manager for the project was a Central European (reportedly an Austrian) who had fought with French *Maquis* during World War II, who had contacts with the Office of Strategic Services and who then became an American citizen and an operative in the CIA, successor to the wartime OSS. He chose the cover name of Frank Bender, and this name was to become closely and publicly associated with the entire operation as it progressed from its strange inception to its tragic end.

This man Bender also had the disadvantage of knowing little about Cuba or Latin America, but those drawbacks, which included his inability to speak Spanish, were compensated by immense energy, monumental self-assurance and a commanding manner that succeeded in impressing a great many Cubans with whom he came in contact. He also had a curious habit of referring to himself in the third person singular when speaking to other people, with the result that his orders communicated directly to his Cuban associates included remarks like, "Bender wants this done or that done."

But perhaps the most important fact about Bender was his penchant for yes-men and his consequent favoritism toward those Cuban exiles who believed that there was nothing wrong in Cuba that a good counterrevolution wouldn't cure by turning the clock back. That Bender's orientation was at variance with those of two adminis-

trations under which he served was a circumstance that gave the entire project the peculiar political flavor that contributed to the disaster. His superiors in Washington gave Bender unusual discretionary power and took his word for much that went on during the months of the invasion's gestation.

In Cuba, the CIA worked mostly out of Havana and Guantanamo Naval Base. In Havana, the principal operative was well attuned to the realities of the Cuban revolution and the shifting nuances of sentiment that were so important to know in judging the reaction of the island if and when an attack came. Unlike many CIA "country chiefs" in Latin America, this agent had considerable insight into hemisphere politics, based on experience. But it is not clear that his views carried any appreciable weight with his superiors and colleagues.

With rare exceptions, the *dramatis personae*, both in Cuba and in Bender's ensemble, lacked any apparent background for evaluating what was happening on the island. One eminent exile leader tells of a conversation with a CIA operative in which the Cuban mentioned Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre, the Peruvian reformer who is as well known in Latin America as Hubert Humphrey is in the United States. "Oh," said our man in Miami brightly, "you mean the Brazilian labor leader."

It is a paradox that when the Soviet Union, Communist China and the satellite countries send agents and technicians to Latin America, the visitors invariably come speaking excellent Spanish and possessing a sound knowledge of Latin American affairs. Coming from the other side of the world, they possess training that was in melancholy shortage among American agents assigned to derail a revolution on an island only ninety miles from Florida.

This lack of background—springing partly from a general neglect of Latin America—accounted for part of the trouble. An added ingredient was the predisposition of many agents to measure reliability by the loudness with which a Cuban denounced Castro and communism. Thus in the eyes of key CIA operatives, former Batista officers were simply anticommunists who were more ardent about opposing the rascal who humiliated their army. This evaluation was swallowed uncritically by higher-ups in Washington. But to many Cubans the distinction between "good" and "bad" Batista officers did not exist.

The final point is mechanical. The CIA men were not only shaping, in effect, foreign policy, but were exempt from any meaningful outside checks on their activities. In-

of United States destroyers that led the pathetic little armada of old cargo ships and landing craft toward the Cuban shore to a by now predetermined destiny.

On Saturday night, "Tony" Varona, who was nominally the "War Minister" in the Revolutionary Council, flew hurriedly from New York to Miami for last-minute consultations. He returned to New York on Sunday morning, just in time for a lunchtime conference of the Council in a suite on the tenth floor of the Lexington Hotel.

Early in the afternoon, the Council was advised that important events were forthcoming and that for reasons of general security, and in order to be ready to return to Cuba, the Council had to slip out of sight. Led by Frank Bender and escorted by ten CIA agents, the members of the Council, still ignorant of what was about to happen, were shepherded downstairs through a back elevator and taken to waiting cars. After a three-hour drive, they arrived at the Philadelphia airport, where they boarded a plane operated by the Immigration Service.

By evening, the aircraft landed at Opa-Locka, just outside Miami. The members of the Council were led to a house on the outskirts of the field. CIA agents armed with rifles guarded the house. Dinner was served to the Council, and each member was issued a duffel bag containing a rebel uniform and campaign equipment.

When members of the Cuban Revolutionary Council inquired about what was occurring, Bender and his aides shook their heads, professing ignorance. It was midnight when the Council members finally went to sleep.

At that moment, the invasion ships were edging close to the coast of the Bay of Pigs.

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The scene shifts from the demimonde of the "black" service and the mobilization tumult in Miami and Havana to a gleaming glass house on the East River in New York where the follies of government become the stuff of debate. The place is the modernistic auditorium in which the United Nations Political Committee is meeting. The time is Saturday morning, April 15.

Raúl Roa, Cuba's Foreign Minister, whose spectacles invariably seem about to slither off his nose, is speaking. "I have been instructed by my government," Roa tells the crowded room, "to denounce before this committee the vandalistic aggression carried out at dawn today against the territorial

integrity of Cuba, with the most grave implication. The responsibility for this act of imperialistic piracy falls squarely on the government of the United States."

The Cuban paused, the room buzzed with talk as Roa resumed to charge that the incident "undoubtedly is the prelude to a large-scale invasion attempt, organized, supplied and financed by the United States with the complicity of satellite dictatorships of the Western Hemisphere."

In tense confrontation, Adlai Stevenson began his reply, confident that the information he had received about the raid was true. The Ambassador of the United States held a photograph of one of the planes that had landed in Florida. "It has the markings of Castro's air force on the tail," Stevenson asserted, pointing to the picture, "which everybody can see for himself. The Cuban star and the initials FAR—Fuerza Aerea Revolucionaria—are clearly visible. The two aircraft which landed in Florida today . . . were piloted by Cuban air force pilots. These pilots and certain other crew members have apparently defected from Castro's tyranny. No United States personnel participated. No United States government planes of any kind participated. These two planes to the best of our knowledge were Castro's own air force planes, and, according to the pilots, they took off from Castro's own air force fields."

With the firmness that springs from conviction, Stevenson turned to the committee and summed up his case: "As President Kennedy said just a few days ago, the basic issue in Cuba is not between the United States and Cuba, it is between the Cubans themselves. . . . The history of Cuba has been a history of fighting for freedom. Regardless of what happens, the Cubans will fight for freedom. The activities of the last 24 hours are an eloquent confirmation of this historical fact."

An ambassador, it is said, is an honest man sent to lie for his commonwealth. But Stevenson had not only been forced to lie, he had thought he was speaking the truth. The man who had to defend the attack before the United Nations was not told the facts about the raid; instead he was given a "cover story" so flimsy that the Cubans were able immediately to place the United States in an excruciatingly embarrassing position.

On Sunday, Castro took the offensive, calling the attack "Cuba's Pearl Harbor," and accurately predicting that its purpose was to destroy the Cuban air force as a prelude to aggression. In a two-hour speech delivered at fever pitch at

OTHER REFERENCES TO BENDER IN CUBAN INVASION:

p.85: "A campaign began to oust (Artime). But the CIA stepped in to protect its young favorite. By this time, it is probable that Bender and his colleagues had already settled on Artime as the putative Castillo Arms of the invasion army..."

p. 89: Manuel Ray "made no secret of his detestation of Mr. Bender, although his public remarks before and after the invasion were circumspect."

p. 107: "MRP Leaders were told that the unpopular Mr. Bender had been assigned to other duties; later, they learned that the ubiquitous Mr. B. had simply changed locale but was still very much in command of the Miami operation."

p. 131: "Council members first heard about the invasion when one of the Cubans happened to turn on a radio and heard a Miami news-cast quoting from the dawn proclamation issued in the Council's name. Bender told the questioning Cubans to stand by and be ready to fly to the beachhead and establish a 'Government in Arms.'"

p. 155: Re the "bizarre cast that trooped around Miami, making and breaking future governments of Cuba"--"At one point, reportedly, Captain Artime jokingly offered the job of Cuban Sports Commissioner to Mr. Bender who, with equal hilarity, accepted...Indeed, Mr. Bender's telephone number was casually offered to a reporter in a bar by a Cuban friend within an hour of the newspaperman's arrival in Miami in March 1961."

There is also this at p. 8: "A New York press agent was handing out war communiques, drafted in the style of a great army's headquarters, that were telephoned to him by an exiled Cuban judge, who in turn was receiving them from the CIA."

No reference to Edouardo.