

Defeat on the Beach

The Bay of Pigs: The Leaders' Story of Brigade 2506, by Haynes Johnson with Manuel Artime, José Perez San Román, Erneido Oliva, and Enrique Ruiz-Williams (Norton. 368 pp. \$5.95), charges the CIA with duplicity toward Presidents Eisenhower and Kennedy with respect to the invasion of Cuba. Harold Lavine visited the island nine times between the Revolution and July 1961. He was there in January 1961, three months before the attack, and returned the following June. In the interim he covered the invasion story for *Newsweek* from Miami.

By HAROLD LAVINE

THIS is a book to make one's flesh crawl. For the Bay of Pigs, like Balaklava, was not just an ordinary disaster; it was the climactic moment of horror in a nightmare of arrogance, ignorance, stupidity, malevolence, and duplicity. Nor is the nightmare over yet. The anonymous men of the Central Intelligence Agency who engineered the disaster are with us still; and they still have the power to engineer other disasters, without anyone knowing what they are doing, not even the President of the United States.

Haynes Johnson bases his account of the Bay of Pigs largely on interviews with survivors of the invasion force, Brigade 2506, and primarily on interviews with the leaders, Manuel Artime, José Perez San Román, Erneido Oliva, and Enrique Ruiz-Williams. Naturally, there are gaps in his story, and certain incidents are glossed over—for example, the mutiny that swept the Brigade while it was in training at Base Trax in Guatemala. Granting this, the fact remains that Johnson has written a powerful and convincing book that will long remain a definitive one.

To this reviewer, the overwhelming fact that emerges from Johnson's book is that, in the CIA, we have created not an agency of the U. S. Government but a government within the government, which at times acts as independently as Charles de Gaulle. In the case of the Bay of Pigs, the CIA occasionally acted as though Dwight D. Eisenhower and later John F. Kennedy were impertinent

outsiders. Twice, they made preparations to defy Kennedy's orders if these orders should displease them. At the very last moment, while men were dying on the beaches, they ignored a White House decision with cheery good will.

Eisenhower was to say later that his Administration never drew up plans to invade Cuba; that all it ever did was train Cuban exiles as guerrillas. Actually, on November 4, 1960, four days before Election Day, the CIA sent a cable to Base Trax reducing the guerrilla force to sixty men and ordering that all the other exiles be given conventional training for a landing in force. Is Eisenhower a liar? As Johnson rightly says, his "integrity cannot be questioned." How, then, can one explain a statement by him at such variance with the facts? Johnson's explanation is chilling: the CIA not only didn't consult him before making its decision; it didn't bother to inform him of the decision later.

KENNEDY inherited the invasion plan, and the anonymous men started worrying that he might cancel it. At Base Trax a man known to history only as Frank called in Pepe San Román and Erneido Oliva. He said there were forces within the Administration which opposed the invasion and that he might be ordered to stop it.

According to Johnson, Pepe San Román remembers Frank's next words this way: "If this happens you come here and make some kind of show, as if you were putting us, the advisers, in prison, and you go ahead with the program as we have talked about it, and we will give you the whole plan, even if we are your prisoners."

Johnson continues: "Frank was quite specific; they were to place an armed Brigade soldier at each American's door, cut communications with the outside, and continue training until he told them when, and how, to leave for the Trampoline base [where the invasion ships would lay waiting]. Frank then laughed and said: 'In the end we will win.'"

Manuel Artime was at Base Trax as civilian representative of the Cuban Revolutionary Council in Miami. Frank called him in and "privately told him the same thing."

Kennedy did, indeed, have qualms about the invasion. On April 4, 1961,

there was a conference at the White House. According to Johnson, Richard Bissell, the CIA official in charge of the invasion plan, assured the President that "an alternative plan had been prepared in the event of a total disaster. The Cubans would be told that if, somehow, the invasion foundered, they would be moved inland as a guerrilla force." The Cubans had been trained in guerrilla fighting, the President was informed; the Zapata, as the swamp surrounding the Bay of Pigs is called, was good guerrilla country. Actually, of course, guerrilla training had stopped except for sixty men on November 4, when there were only 300 men in the Brigade, and the Zapata is probably the worst guerrilla country imaginable.

Whether or not Bissell gave his assurances to Kennedy in good faith, the fact remains: the anonymous men at Base Trax never informed the Brigade leaders of the alternative plan; they feared that doing so would hurt morale. And they never attempted to carry out the alternative, even after the landing had proved a failure.

The behavior of the anonymous men is simply unbelievable. Johnson reports: "It was five o'clock in the afternoon on Friday, April 14 . . . Frank took Pepe aside. He told him that if he were ordered to halt the invasion while the ships were at sea he would send Pepe a message saying: COME BACK, DON'T GO AHEAD.

"That meant the opposite. . . ."

The men of the Brigade landed on April 17. With a few notable exceptions (the 5th Battalion played hide-and-go-seek), they fought bravely and with incredible skill. They slaughtered Fidel's militia—but they were doomed from the first because they were 1,500 against 300,000. This reviewer, who toured Cuba three months before the invasion and saw the plans Fidel was making to repel it, has long wondered how the U. S. Government ever thought it could succeed. Johnson offers an explanation. He quotes San Román:

"Then Dave, the Intelligence expert, told us that Castro could not react for at least seventy-two hours . . . and also that Fidel didn't have any forces close to the place. The closest were in Santa Clara and that was far away. . . ."

"He also said there were no communications between Castro's troops and that if they saw us landing they would have to take a car and go sixty kilometers to Covadonga to telephone. He said there were no civilians in the zone. They were conducting a resort for tourists there but it was still a very isolated area."

According to Johnson, "Dave also gave them this intelligence: Castro
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would have no tanks and no air force . . .”

The CIA agents in Cuba must have been deaf, dumb, and blind. For as early as January 1961 there were Czech guns and Russian tanks everywhere one turned in Cuba. The island was studded with gun emplacements and crawling with tanks. There was even a Russian tank on the grounds of the Hotel Nacional, which had been turned into a barracks. Everywhere one drove he saw men stringing telephone lines; the army already had established an elaborate microwave network. And, of course, Fidel did have an air force. What is more, the Fidelistas publicized what they were doing. The newspapers carried page one stories about the preparations for the invasion, including one this reviewer remembers well: a story in *Revolución* about a camp that had been set up where 400 Czech officers and NCOs were training militiamen in the use of Czech field pieces.

And then again . . . perhaps the CIA agents really weren't deaf, dumb, and blind. For there is ample evidence in Johnson's book to support the belief that, after a while, the anonymous men became so obsessed with the idea of invading Cuba they were ready to lie to anyone, the President, the Cuban exile leaders, the Brigade leaders, anyone, to carry out their plans.

In contrast, Fidel was always the realist. He had agents at Base Trax; he knew precisely what was going on there; he even knew the cover names of the anonymous men. He had prepared for every possibility, including the bombing of his airfields that preceded the invasion. He did have men in the Zapata as well as a communications system.

Unlike most horror stories, the story of the Bay of Pigs has a moral. As Johnson says in his epilogue: "At least one general conclusion can be drawn. No agency should be permitted to operate without some form of independent, critical outside examination." To anyone who believes in responsible government, the idea that anonymous men should have been able to lead the United States into a major moral and diplomatic disaster (if not a military one) under a cloak that at times hid their activities even from the President is terrifying.