

Bay of Pigs Veteran

Recalls Event

By CARL HARRIS

The voice identified itself as "Riley" and crackled the radio warning: "Go back. This is worse than Korea."

The sound went dead but was replaced with another, requesting the services of a Catalina aircraft to order a search for the first craft. Then there was only the sound of exploding shells.

"Riley" was American pilot Riley W. Shamburger Jr. His terse message, probably his last, signaled the end of the ill-fated 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion aimed at ridding Cuba of Fidel Castro.

The words are burned into the memory of Edwardo Insua Whitehouse, a Cuban-American veteran of the Bay of Pigs now living in Dallas.

The story of "Teddy" Whitehouse in many ways is the story of Shamburger, a man known only as "Jimmy," and some 1,500 other men who took part in the invasion operation.

The memory of that story was sharpened again for Whitehouse this week when he read a national magazine's story relating how Shamburger and three other American pilots were killed in the invasion.

Details of the invasion came freely in an interview at the modest but neat Whitehouse home at 6141 Oram.

The 46-year-old balding blond was born of an American father and Cuban mother on Cuban soil. The moderately wealthy family got a foothold on the island two generations ago when Whitehouse's grandfather bought a Cuban sugar mill.

He got a job piloting for Cubana Airlines, making the trans-Atlantic run from Havana to Madrid. In 1952, he became director of civil aviation for Cuba while continuing his airline job.

Whitehouse maintained both positions under the Fulgencio Batista government. Then came the Castro takeover.

A "registered" American citizen, Whitehouse sought to exile himself and family, which included two sons, Edward, 15, and Roger, 14, by a previous marriage.



—Dallas News Staff Photo by Jack Beers.

Whitehouse displays invasion emblem.

A month-long investigation ensued to determine Whitehouse's "honesty." Finally, in April, 1959, he was given a Castro-government certificate attesting to his honest service under Batista, thus allowing escape to Miami, Fla.

Rumors were rampant in the Miami Cuban community that a force was being assembled to fight Castro.

"There were known recruiting officers—some three or four of them. I made contact with a man named Jimmy. No other name—no identification, but he smelled CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) all over."

Because Whitehouse was an experienced pilot and in good physical condition, he was "hired."

He was sent to a base called Retaluleuh in the Guatemalan jungle early in 1961.

Training consisted of dropping supplies from B26's (holdovers from Korea), DC4's and C46's. In Whitehouse's group there were about 40 Air Force pilots and another 200 in the ground crews.

"Our instructors were American. They were extremely good . . . we just presumed they were high-ranking Army," he said.

The Americans were allowed to leave camp, the Cubans were not, he continued.

"Before I got there, I was told, United Nations inspection teams visited the camp a couple of times. The men were always sent into the woods to hide. The base was explained as a Guatemalan Army post, Whitehouse said.

Two months before the invasion, the small army — now known as the 2506 Brigade — moved to Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua.

The first raids started on April 15 and were repeated the next day. Damage to the targets were negligible as the missions were hampered by Castro T-33 and Sea Fury planes.

The infantry moved in on April 17, and Whitehouse drew his first assignment on April 19 — a daylight run over the Bay of Pigs airport.

"As we approached the Cuban coast, we didn't see any of the

promised air cover. I was the first one in with three other transports behind me."

(Whitehouse was flying an unarmed DC-4 with orders to drop supplies to the infantry. The other transports had similar instructions.)

Although Whitehouse could not see them, he knew of three B-26's in front of him. They were piloted by two Americans each in two planes and a Cuban, Gonzalo Herrera, alone in another.

Whitehouse made his drop and returned to base through terrific ground fire. "I flew 50 feet above the water. That's the only thing that saved me."

Despite the combined American-Cuban heroics of delivering the supplies, Whitehouse later learned it was for nothing.

The things they dropped could not be used — crated .45 cal. pistols still in cosmoline (a grease), no food or water and wrong ammunition.

The run of mistakes was not over.

On April 20 volunteers were sought to make another run, this time to a spot 10 miles south of Bayamo ("a heavily fortified zone") to drop supplies to a rebel band led by a Nino Diaz.

"We made the mission, looked for the prearranged signal but didn't find it. They began firing on us with canons so we had to leave.

"It wasn't until six months later we found out that Diaz had never left the U.S. mainland."

Today, the experience is no less humiliating and tragic to Whitehouse.

He does not question the sincerity of his American advisers. "They were crying when we returned from the Bay of Pigs."

He does bitterly condemn American policy makers who withdrew air support. "With it, we could have won," he maintains.

Whitehouse also denounces the government's failure to openly recognize those who gave their lives in the fizzled coup. "It is terrible to think we risked our lives for nothing."

Today, Whitehouse is trying to settle in Dallas. He has had several job offers but has not accepted because they would take him from the city.

He lives only for the day he will return to Cuba—for good.