

Here let him rest; while we this truth report
He's gone from hence unto a higher court
To plead his cause, where he by this doth know
Whether to Caesar he was friend, or foe.
—Unkown Virginia Colonist, 1676

Dedicated to Riley Shamburger,
Pete Ray, Leo Baker
and Wade Gray.

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CONTENTS

	Preface	
I	Birmingham	1
II	Florida	15
III	Central America	27
IV	The Bay of Pigs	45
V	Trinidad	73
VI	Post Mortems	77
VII	The Aftermath and the CIA	89

Fear will be tied around your wrist. But fliers.
Before our times have had that weight there, too,
and heard the long wind screaming through the wires,
And have done what they have told themselves to do.

—John Holmes, 1943

PREFACE

With the possible exception of our current travail in Vietnam, the U.S. sponsored invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs by a brigade of Cuban exiles in April, 1961, will, no doubt, remain one of the most controversial episodes in the modern history of U.S. foreign affairs.

In the normal course of events, it would seem, this unfortunate affair might have been written off as an unsuccessful initial sortie by a new presidential administration which had inherited a rather large can of worms from its predecessor. But, unlike many of the undeclared wars and military police actions in which the United States government has been involved in the past, the Bay of Pigs has a peculiar and lingering flavor all its own. No doubt this is compounded in part of the large measure of clandestine activity which was a necessary, if unmanageable, ingredient; the fact that no U. S. military forces were directly engaged in a military action to which the United States had committed full scale support in money, equipment and human talent; and that when the dice were cast at the Bay of Pigs, the power and prestige of the United States were on the line.

Perhaps as much as anything else, the Bay of Pigs and its aftermath serves as an example of how difficult it often is for the American

people to discover and to understand the real policies, plans and goals of their government, and how easy it is for them to be misled by those in government who control the sources and the dissemination of information. One high ranking cabinet officer, Arthur Sylvester, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, has made the widely quoted statement that the government has an unqualified *right* to lie to the people. This "right" was quite thoroughly exercised following the disaster at the Bay of Pigs.

When the role of the United States government at the Bay of Pigs began to emerge, and the full impact of our defeat felt, members of Congress, the nation's press and the American public quickly were roused to full cry. Everyone began to course back and forth through the halls of government in search of trails which would lead to the sanctuaries of those responsible. Predictably, most of the trails led nowhere. President Kennedy assumed full personal responsibility. Then, to demonstrate that he was *not* personally responsible, he appointed a committee to conduct an investigation. Members of this committee were General Maxwell Taylor, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, CIA Director Allen Dulles and Admiral Arleigh Burke. The results of

this committee's investigation have never been made public.

Efforts by concerned members of Congress (led principally by Senator Everett Dirksen) to conduct an independent investigation were consistently blocked. As a result the American people have never received a straight report from official sources in government saying how and why an imaginative and daring plan to eliminate an armed garrison of the Soviet Union from an island ninety miles off the coast of Florida was allowed to fail.

What the American people have been told are stories designed to create an impression that *nothing* really went wrong that could have been prevented, and that every possible effort was made that could have been made to carry out a mission that was doomed to failure from the start. Heads rolled at the CIA, of course, and there was a thunderous beating of breasts at the White House—the over-all theme being that the President had been the victim of inexcusably bad advice and that he had been virtually betrayed by the CIA into committing errors in judgment which permitted that agency of the government to both conceive and execute its own plans without review by other and more objective authority. As it must, and always does, the CIA took this rap in silence. Many people in high places began to breathe more easily, and the Bay of Pigs became established in most people's minds as a highly unfortunate but, under the circumstances, an unavoidable disaster.

To those of us who were so briefly engaged—even though only at a low operational level—in this covert undertaking, the CIA is an entirely different organization than it seems to be to many who see it as a semi-autonomous agency wielding enormous power, having huge sums of money at its disposal, and apparently accountable to no one for its actions. It is unfortunate that the nature of the CIA's activities and responsibilities automatically precludes a public relations department in its table of organization. Consequently, the public's attitude toward the CIA is often a product of independent journalistic efforts by people whose contacts, motives and

research in this area leave much to be desired. A few months activity in Central America under the highly restrictive conditions that existed at the time, certainly does not qualify me as an expert on the Central Intelligence Agency. However, my personal observations, even under these circumstances, entirely refute widespread allegations that the Bay of Pigs was an exclusively CIA engineered fiasco. Whatever the reasons for the failure may be, they are not to be found in the planning, the training, nor in the decisions made by those in operational command in the field. The CIA people in command of the invasion at the Bay of Pigs were not an assortment of James Bond—type secret agents skulking around in the boondocks of Central America. Most of them were highly trained experts in various fields of military operations. Many in positions of authority were not CIA employees in the strict sense of the word at all. General Reid Doster, for example, is an outstanding wing commander of an Air Guard unit who was given extended leave in order to provide his considerable talents to the operation.

Unfortunately, the original plan for the invasion conceived by the CIA and the Defense Department was cancelled late in the game. Control of the operation was removed from the hands of the field commanders and within hours after the first mission was launched against Castro's airfields on Saturday morning, April 15, they were obviously forced to ad lib an entirely new script in the face of a continuous flow of directives and rapidly changing policy decisions from Washington. It may be that modern day communications have become *too* sophisticated. If it is possible today for people in Washington to select targets, order bomb loadings and direct infantry patrols from a set of maps spread out on a living room floor, it may be that by tomorrow commanders of armies in the field will have become little more than administrative agents—even though they may be five thousand miles away.

In the intervening years many books and accounts have been published which purport

to describe "what happened" at the Bay of Pigs, and why. Whether or not these works can be considered "authorized" accounts of this affair is hard to say. Certainly they must be considered as at least quasi-official in the sense that the authors attribute their information to sources at the highest levels of government—sources which, as far as the authors are concerned, are unimpeachable. Some of these authors were intimate, personal advisors to President Kennedy (Arthur Schlesinger actually participated in many of the planning and policy meetings where decisions were made), and they speak from a level of competency difficult to challenge. At any rate, there is little doubt that the authors of these so-called authoritative accounts *have* had access to some of the top desk drawers in Washington. In their explicitly detailed descriptions of events, and in their reporting of the words, thoughts and almost hour to hour activity of everyone connected with the Bay of Pigs invasion, they leave little doubt but that everything they report came right straight from the horse's mouth. Most of it quite probably did, too. The interesting point is, however, none of these "authentic" versions of the Bay of Pigs invasion bears more than a superficial relationship to the true facts, nor, interestingly enough, do they bear any particular relationship to one another. Unfortunately, as time goes on, future historians will no doubt accept these accounts as authoritative and excellent reference works.

Opinions have varied widely concerning the propriety, if not to say the morality, of the U.S. government's sponsorship of an effort to oust by force the head of a foreign government from office. There seems to be little question in anyone's mind, however, that in the commitment of the United States government to an adventure of this sort, nothing short of complete success could possibly be acceptable as a final result. Nothing, it seems, was ever farther from accomplishment.

The questions that have arisen in the minds of many Americans since then are legitimate questions. If there were highly placed individuals involved in this affair who were guilty

of serious blunders, unwarranted preemption of authority, or tragic errors in judgement, should they be permitted to find sanctuary in high positions, and to use personal power and prestige to shift responsibility to other shoulders, while conning the American people in the process?

Perhaps the answers are not as difficult to find as they have been made to appear. Arthur Schlesinger, who was present at most of the meetings where decisions were made, has said that President Kennedy, wracked by indecision as to whether to proceed or to cancel the operation he had inherited, and faced with the troublesome problem of what to do with the Cubans in Guatemala if he decided to cancel the invasion, finally said:

"If we have to get rid of these men, it is much better to dump them in Cuba than in the United States, if that is where they want to go."

Then, according to Schlesinger, President Kennedy canceled the original plans prepared by the CIA and the Pentagon as "too spectacular" and selected one that he liked better. "He did not want a big amphibious invasion," says Schlesinger. "He wanted a 'quiet' landing, preferably at night."

It might seem, then, that General Maxwell Taylor expressed the Kennedy administration's true concern when, in hearings before the House Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, he refused to discuss the findings of the Presidential panel that investigated the Bay of Pigs. Obviously General Taylor was not primarily concerned with "national security" when he told the congressional committee it would be unfortunate to reopen the question because it would lead to "highly controversial, divisive public discussion . . . which would be damaging to all parties concerned."

The big question is, divisive in what way, and damaging to precisely whom?

Like wild onions in the front yard, it seems that the Bay of Pigs is destined to keep cropping up.

Albert C. Persons

Birmingham, Alabama
January, 1968

The jaws of power are always opened to devour, and her arm is always stretched out to destroy the freedom of thinking, speaking and writing. Be not intimidated, therefore, by any terrors, from publishing with the utmost freedom whatever can be warranted by the laws of your country; nor suffer yourselves to be wheedled out of your liberty by any pretenses of politeness, delicacy, or decency. These, as they are often used, are but three different name for hypocrisy, chicanery, and cowardice.

—John Adams, 1765

BIRMINGHAM

The two men in the cockpit of the twin-engine bomber were stiff and uncomfortable after long hours of rigid concentration in the crowded cockpit. At the first hint from the east that the night was gone, the darkness began to disappear from the face of the sea below them and some of their tension eased. Imperceptibly at first, then swiftly, the fluorescent glow that outlined engine and flight instruments faded. Radio and electric panels, the throttle quadrant and flight controls began to take shape. The first rays from the sun found the aircraft's propellers and turned them into two shimmering medallions of silver.

The deck watch on a Panama-bound freighter turned his head toward the faint, distant throb of engines. In the half-light of dawn the aircraft was a tiny silhouette suspended so low over the water that at times it seemed to merge with the sea. It was on a northerly heading. The sailor's first thought was that the aircraft was ditching. He reached for the bell to signal the bridge, but as he continued to watch, the aircraft kept flying. In a few minutes it disappeared over the horizon.

Pete Ray was in the left seat behind the control column of the B-26. Pete's throat was raw from too many cigarettes chain-smoked

through the night. His T-shirt, soaked with sweat earlier, was cold and damp against his bare skin.

In the observer's seat beside Pete, Leo Baker stared fixedly ahead at the horizon, his eyes red-rimmed and dry. The sea was a sheet of grey-green metal unwinding slowly off a giant roller on the distant horizon, picking up speed as it moved, racing aft less than a hundred feet below the wings of the aircraft. Leo squeezed his eyes tight shut, then opened them. The clean, straight line of the horizon was beginning to blur. In a few seconds the line thickened, then became uneven and broken. The south coast of Cuba materialized slowly out of the sea twenty miles dead ahead.

Pete sighed. His right hand drifted nervously toward the throttle quadrant, then back to the control column without changing the power setting. Low in his bowels an uncomfortable pressure was beginning to build.

To the bone-weary remnants of Cuban Brigarde 2506 on shore, the B-26 came in off the waters of the Bay of Pigs as a sudden roar of engines overhead and a dark flash that crossed the beach and disappeared low over the inland swamps. From the air the Zapata swamps showed dense and green through

BAY OF PIGS

heavy patches of the early morning ground fog that blanketed the coastal area. Through a break in the fog Leo caught sight of a thin ribbon of dirt road angling off to the right of the aircraft's course. He nudged Pete, who nodded without turning his head. The aircraft banked steeply, leveled off and flew inland, following the road toward a column of black, oily smoke that rose perpendicular from the ground a few miles ahead. Twenty minutes later Pete picked up the microphone in the cockpit, pressed the key, and in a tight, even voice said, "We're going in."

Within thirty minutes from the time they crossed the coast of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs, Thomas Willard "Pete" Ray and Leo Francis Baker were dead. So were Riley Shamburger and Wade Gray who crashed two hundred yards off shore, shot down in a spinning sheet of flame by one of Castro's two T-33 jet trainers. Four other B-26's returned to their base at Puerto Cabeza, Nicaragua, that morning. One was escorted off the beach by three unmarked U.S. Navy jet fighters. They flew formation with the B-26 until the pilot was able to signal the jets to break off and return to the beach.

The day was Wednesday, April 19, 1961. By nightfall the last echoes of the three day battle at the Bay of Pigs had died.

Six hundred miles away across the Gulf of Mexico, in a tent camp pitched close by the end of a long, paved airstrip, a Spanish priest had erected a makeshift altar of empty ammunition boxes. The priest had walked out from Puerto Cabeza at dusk to perform a funeral mass for Leo Baker. The altar was protected from the first heavy drops of a late evening thunder shower by a canvass tarpaulin that had been strung from the lower branches of surrounding trees. The priest was assisted by a Cuban who was dressed in shorts, a dirty T-shirt and unlaced hunting boots. Quietly in the darkness the men began to gather. Those who were Catholic knelt with heads bowed. Candle flames flickered and bent flat before the wind. Night sounds from the jungle close

by accompanied the priest as he performed the ritual service.

When it was over I walked back to the tent where Leo and I had lived. I folded the few articles of clothing hanging from nails in the tent pole by Leo's cot and stuffed them into a blue canvass duffle bag. I folded a thin army blanket and put it on top of the clothes. There were two letters under the pillow on the cot. I put the two letters in the duffle bag and fished a pair of boots and a pair of sandals out from underneath the cot. I put them into the bag last. The whole thing took about three minutes.

Five men were gathered at the far end of the tent drinking beer. They were huddled together on two cots, away from the gusts of rain that blew in under the canvass walls of the tent. A naked light bulb hung from the ridge pole over their heads. I tossed Leo's duffle bag onto his cot and joined the other men. One of them dug into a small ice chest and handed me a cold beer.

"Goddamit to hell," he said.

"What the hell *happened*?" another man said.

I became involved in the affair that cost Shamburger, Ray, Baker and Gray their lives at the Bay of Pigs in January, 1961. I was flying a DC-3 for a Birmingham construction company at the time. I arrived about noon one day at the hangar where our aircraft was based on the Birmingham Municipal Airport. My co-pilot, Ed Friday, was already in the operations office. Ed said Riley Shamburger was looking for me. He said that Riley was lining up people for some kind of flying job that required considerable flying experience—along with a military background. I recall that I became irritated at Ed and what appeared to me to be an unnecessary coyness on his part. I hadn't been around the airport for a couple of days and I got the impression that Riley was not only "looking for me" but that Ed knew a great deal about something that was going on and simply wasn't going to tell me. He insisted that I go over to Hayes immediately and find Riley. Hayes is an air-

BIRMINGHAM

craft modification contractor for the U.S. Air Force. Riley was a test pilot for Hayes and also a Major in the Alabama Air Guard unit based at Birmingham. I found Riley in the Hayes flight test operations building.

"Ed says you're looking for me. What's up?"

"How much four-engine time you got, Buck?"

"I don't know. About 1200 hours on B-17's and a few hours on 24's."

"I'm working on a deal with Reid," Riley said. "We need some four-engine drivers with military experience. It's out of this country. I can't tell you where. All I can tell you is that it's legitimate."

("Reid" is Major General George Reid Doster, Commanding General of the 117th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing of the Air National Guard.)

"That's a great inducement," I said. "Are you under some impression that what I've been doing is *not* legitimate?"

"Oh bullshit, Buck. Listen, Reid's out of town until next week. How about talking to him when he gets back?"

"Okay, I'll talk to him. Meantime how about giving me some kind of clue."

"I can't, but you'll buy it. Are you scheduled to go out?"

"I've got a trip to Oke City Monday. I'll be back in Wednesday."

"I'll tell Reid you'll call him when you get in."

"I'll call him. Incidentally, Riley, when does this legitimate job start?"

"Right away. The next two or three weeks."

"That's great. I'll have time to get my laundry done. By the way, what kind of clothes will I be needing where we're going?"

"None. We're all going to be running around naked. Just call Reid. Incidentally, I guess you know this is all kind of confidential?"

"It sure as hell is so far."

"Okay, just keep it under your hat—if you own one."

Ed Friday was skulking around on the ramp outside when I left Riley's office. He started chattering. "What did Riley say?" Are you going to take it? Listen, I want to go *with* you guys."

"Friday!" I put a hand on each shoulder. "What is this deal? You seem to know all about it. What the hell is this all about? Come on, give out with some poop."

"Captain Buck! They're going to start a revolution! Where do you think all these guard guys have been going since last fall?"

"I didn't know they'd been going anywhere. What guard guys are you talking about? Where's the revolution?"

"There isn't hardly a ground crew left over there." (This was a considerable exaggeration). "They've been going out for the last two or three months." Ed began to show some exasperation. "They're going to invade *Cuba*. That's why Riley is lining up these C-54 pilots. I don't know where they are, but it's somewhere down in Central America. Maybe Venezuela." (Geography was not Ed's long suit.)

The truth is, I *hadn't* heard any of the rumors that had apparently been circulating around the airport at Birmingham for several weeks. I knew Reid Doster and I knew several of the Air Guard pilots in his Wing (only one of whom, other than Riley, actually participated in the Bay of Pigs operation). I had no Guard connections myself, however, and I knew very few of the ground crew members. Ed Friday had done a year's tour of duty with the Guard after graduating from flying training school. He ran around with several of the younger Guard pilots from whom he had learned that some of the enlisted specialists *had* been leaving Birmingham at intervals, and they were supposed to be "somewhere down in Central America."

Even though this was the first inkling I had that an operation such as the one Riley suggested was in the making, suddenly it all

made sense. I felt that what the rumors may have lacked in accurate detail, in substance they were probably well founded. Three months earlier I had been in San Diego where I had read a newspaper story about an American contractor who was building an airstrip somewhere in Guatemala—an extremely hush, hush job under the tightest security controls. All at once I felt certain I knew where the Air Guard troops from across the field had disappeared to.

On Wednesday in the week following my conversation with Riley Shamburger I returned from a flight to Oklahoma City. Twenty miles out of Birmingham I called the control tower for landing instructions.

"Runway two-three, twenty two How Charlie. Wind 10 knots, two six zero degrees, altimeter two nine eight one. Report Roebuck."

I reported on final over the Roebuck Shopping Center and was cleared to land. It was late in the afternoon on a grey overcast day. The shopping center parking area was full. Lights blazed in all the stores. Street lights were beginning to come on. I touched down on the runway and Ed Friday raised the flaps and unlocked the tail wheel. When we turned off the runway Ed spoke to the ground control operator who cleared us all the way to the hangar. A minute later ground control called back. "General Doster requests Buck Persons to come to his office after he parks the airplane."

The 117th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing of the Alabama Air Guard is located on the north side of Birmingham's airport. It was dark by the time I drove around the field and parked outside the two story headquarters building. Colonel Burt Gurley, General Doster's adjutant, was in his office next to General Doster's.

"Come on in, Buck, the General's waiting for you."

Burt preceded me into the General's office, then backed out, closing the door behind him. I shook hands with Doster and sat down in a chair beside his desk.

"Well, what's it all about, Reid?"

"Buck, I've got a job to recruit six experienced pilots for four-engine work, and six B-26 pilots. These have to be pilots with military experience, but with no current military connections. I want you for C-54's. About all I can tell you right now about the job is this. It's outside the continental limits of the United States. It's in this hemisphere. There will be shooting involved. And it's very much in the interest of our government. The job will last about three months."

There wasn't much for me to say except to ask when the job started.

"You'll be leaving here in about two or three weeks—if you want to go. If you do, I need to know now, tonight. I've got my B-26 pilots lined up, and I've been holding up waiting for you to get back in to fill out the C-54 crews. I'll need to get your clearance tonight if you're going to go."

"If it's as simple as that, put me down to go."

"All right. Be back over here at 8 o'clock Monday morning. There'll be some people down from Washington for a briefing. Now don't say anything about this at home for the time being. There'll be some instructions on what to say and how to clear yourself with your family on this thing, and I don't want any of you pilots jumping the gun. The same thing goes for your jobs. Everybody's getting a leave of absence, including me, or otherwise working their job problems out. But don't try and do anything until after you've been briefed Monday. Are you going to have any problems?"

"No", I said, "I won't have any problems." There were questions but this didn't seem to be the time to ask them. "So, I'll see you Monday."

"Okay, Buck. I'm sorry I can't go into any more detail right now. You can figure anything out you want to for yourself, and I guess you'll be pretty close."

The things I could figure out for myself were fairly obvious. General Doster would

not have had any part in an operation which involved aircraft and "shooting" if it were not something that the U.S. government was involved in. Equally obvious was the fact that it was not an overt military operation—otherwise there would have been no reason to recruit people like me with no current military status. All of which could only spell one thing—Cuba, and some kind of U.S. government support of a covert action in which Cuban exiles were unquestionably involved.

General Doster stopped me as I walked toward the door. "Hey!"

I looked back.

"Don't you want to know how much the job pays?"

"Well—I don't know whether I do or not. How much?"

"Twenty-eight hundred dollars a month—plus some possible bonus arrangements."

"That ought to tell me something, I guess."

"Yes, I guess it ought to," Doster said.

On the way home I thought about the "bonus" arrangements. Bonuses are paid for something over and above what the duties and responsibilities of a job normally require. In this case it seemed clear that any bonuses would be tied in closely with the "shooting" Reid had mentioned.

When I got home that night I did some more thinking. There was no doubt that the United States government viewed Castro and his regime, and his connections with international communism, with serious alarm. The highest levels of authority had decided that the security of the United States was in danger as long as Castro remained in power, and they had decided to do something about it. Through what devious channels the implementation of this high-level decision had gotten bucked down the line to General Doster was a matter of pure speculation on my part. But I had apparently received a personal invitation to help out—at least that's the way I chose to look at it.

General Doster had said something about having to get me cleared that night. The briefing by the people from Washington was

only a few days off. How could anyone, with no military or government connections for more than twenty years, be cleared for an operation like this in a matter of hours—a few days at most? Any records of mine were bound to be buried ten feet deep in some warehouse.

I was in General Doster's office next morning before 9 o'clock.

"Reid," I started, "last night you said you would have to get me cleared immediately for this job. The briefing is Monday morning, only four days off. There isn't any way I can be cleared in this length of time. I haven't had any military service since World War II..."

"Hold it, hold it," Reid interrupted. "You're all cleared. You're going. Just be here Monday morning."

"You mean since last night . . . but that doesn't seem. . . that isn't pos. . ."

"Just be here Monday morning, Buck."

"That's it? That's definite?"

"Definite."

On the way out of the headquarters building I ran into Colonel Hal McGee. I had met Hal a few days before having a beer with Riley.

"Are you all set, Buck?" Hal asked.

"I guess so," I answered cautiously. "How about you?"

"Riley and I and the General have to go to Washington this afternoon. We may not be back until late Sunday night. I just wanted to make sure you were all lined up for the briefing Monday morning."

I hadn't known, of course, that Hal had anything to do with the operation, but, then, up until a few days before I hadn't known anything at all, much less who might be involved. During the next few days I did learn that General Doster had had difficulty finding pilots (this seemed to be one of his responsibilities) without military connections who had the necessary experience. When they arrived in Birmingham for the briefing, they came from all sections of the United States.

On Monday morning I reported at 8 o'clock at Air Guard Headquarters. Hal McGee was in the hall outside Reid Doster's office.

"Where's the briefing, Hal?"

"Go upstairs and down to the far end of the hall on the other end of the building. There's a bunch already there."

"Are you coming?"

"No, I won't be in on the briefing," Hal said. "I've already been briefed. So has Riley. We're part of the program, but we have a little bit different deal."

Riley and Hal it seemed were on a somewhat higher plane than the rest of us. Along with Reid Doster, they had been in on the planning of the operation and knew considerably more than the rest of us about what was going to happen.

In the hall upstairs a group of men were gathered around a coffee urn on a table against the wall. I met Bill Peterson, Al Walters, Joe Harbert and Pete Ray who were B-26 pilots. Pete lived in a small town close to Birmingham. The others were from out of state. Ernie King and Gordon Neilson were C-54 pilots. They had apparently known each other in the Korean War. Sandy Sanders was a flight engineer with the Air Guard unit in Birmingham. Red Cornish was another flight engineer who had known Riley Shamburger somewhere. There were several other men in the group.

I shook hands with two or three of the pilots and exchanged a few fatuous remarks. Up to this moment no one had known how many or who would be in the group. No one knew exactly what the process of selection had been, and there was a certain amount of suppressed curiosity in evidence as we all milled around trying to act as if we knew what we were doing and speculating on how much the other guys knew that we didn't know.

Joe Harbert walked over to where I was standing by the coffee pot. "Buck, I see you've been elected. What are you going to fly?"

"C-54's according to Reid. What about you?"

"I'm on B-26's. The best I can figure out we've got two sets of pilots. Bill Peterson, Al Walters, Ron Smith, Don Gordon, Pete Ray and I are all B-26 pilots. That guy over there, I think his name is Fred Ealey, he's a C-54 pilot. I don't know where he's from. I don't know these other guys, but I guess they must be part of the C-54 crews."

Ernie King walked up while Joe was talking. "That's Wade Gray," he said, pointing, "and that's Jack Vernon. They're both radio operators."

"What are we going to do with radio operators?" I asked. I haven't had a radio operator on an airplane since World War II."

"I don't know," Joe said, "but it looks to me like we must be going way to hell down in the boondocks somewhere."

"What's the hold up now?" I asked Joe.

"We're waiting for Ron to get in with a guy from Tampa. He went down to pick him up in a T-bird. Left at six this morning. They should be getting in any minute."

Ron arrived ten minutes later with another man whom he introduced as Earl Carter. Leo Baker also showed up. I knew Leo. He was a flight test engineer who worked for Hayes. Reid Doster came up the stairs and told everyone to go down to the end of the hall to the conference room.

There was one long table in the conference room. Four men were sitting at the table when we entered—one at the end, the other three beside him along one side. We all found places and sat down. I sat down next to the man at the end of the table and across from the other three. One of the men got up and shut the door.

When we were all settled, the man at the end of the table said: "Gentlemen, I'm Al." Al introduced the other three men as "Frank", "Jake", and "Hoyt". Then Al went on to describe who and what they were and the purpose of the briefing.

Al said that he and the other three men with him were agents for a group of wealthy Cubans who were financing an operation to re-

move Castro from power in Cuba. He said that with General Doster's assistance we had been recruited to perform combat missions that were vital to the success of this mission. Al said that they already had the necessary aircraft and, in fact, that they had crews whom he described as "foreign nationals". It seems that Al and his group did not feel confident that these "foreign nationals" would perform successfully when the time came. He indicated that they had already had some problems with some of these crews who, it seemed, sometimes dropped their loads into the ocean instead of into the hands of the guerilla groups for whom they were intended. Therefore, Al's people had felt that it was necessary to recruit pilots who had previous combat experience and who could be depended on to carry out air strikes, and other missions, that would precede land military actions against Castro—by these same foreign nationals.

As Al talked I studied him and the three men across the table from me. Al was pleasant and articulate. He was a man in his mid-forties. He had black hair and a tooth-brush mustache. He looked something like Melvin Douglas, and he had more the manner of a sales manager conducting a meeting than of a person conspiring to overthrow the head of a foreign government. We were to see more of Al in the weeks to come in Central America. He and one of the men with him, Frank, were top commanders in the field.

Frank looked like anything but what he was. He would have been completely in character as, say, a salesman at a "credit clothiers." He was, maybe, five-five and, as they say, couldn't have weighed more than 135 pounds soaking wet. His hair was light brown, thin and wispy. He had bright, intelligent eyes that swept constantly and pleasantly from face to face around the table.

The other two men, Jake and Hoyt, created a strange impression. They seemed, somehow, to look alike, but they didn't—not at all. Jake was very tall and thin. He had a long neck and a prominent Adam's apple. Hoyt, on the

other hand, was of medium height and build, had medium brown hair and neutral brown eyes. The similarity was more in facial expression—or rather, in the lack of it. Somehow, they both gave the impression that their faces had been carved out of stone, or poured from a plaster cast. The lines and wrinkles and indentations were there, all where they should have been, but nothing moved. You had to look closely to be sure they were breathing. Even their eyes were stony. When one of the men around the table spoke, the eyes moved in his direction and remained fixed on the speaker until he had finished. While there was no facial expression as such, there was a "conveyance" of sorts. You got the distinct impression that they had been through this same drill many times before, that they didn't believe anything anyone had to say, and that they really didn't care. I remember thinking to myself. "Here are a couple of guys you could *never* make friends with." Neither Jake nor Hoyt spoke a word throughout the entire meeting. We only saw them once again and that was at a second briefing ten days later in the same conference room where their roles, if not their identities, came into a little sharper focus.

Al described in skimpy detail what our jobs would be. Like General Doster he would only say that we would be based outside the continental limits of the United States but in this hemisphere. He did not say in what country, or countries. The C-54 pilots would make air drops of troops and equipment after hostilities began, and would do a lot of flying of equipment, supplies and people in the meantime. He said we might have to fly with some of the "foreign nationals" (for some reason he wouldn't identify them as Cuban exiles), but that in any such event we would be in command of the aircraft. Al said the B-26 pilots would perform bombing and strafing missions.

In conclusion, Al instructed everyone at the table to prepare a "cover story" to explain our absence from homes and jobs. These stories would have to be well thought out and convincing. He didn't care what they were. Each

man would know best what would be convincing in whatever quarters convincing was required. We were instructed to prepare these cover stories before the next, and final, briefing, and to be prepared to check them out with him and his three associates—whose trained eyes could be counted on to detect any structural flaws. Each of us was also asked to be prepared to come up with the name of a city, anywhere in the United States, with which we were sufficiently familiar to know the names of streets and places. These had to be large cities Al said, not small towns. Al asked if there were any questions anyone wanted to ask. At this point I detected the first small signs of life in the two stone faces.

I had one question: "It is clear enough that this is a military operation," I said, "and you have mentioned the 'foreign nationals' and the fact that we might have to fly with some of them on occasion. You have also mentioned your employers, the group of wealthy Cubans. What I want to ask is this. Is it safe to assume that the military aspects of this operation will be under the direction of, say, professional military people, rather than under the control of these foreign nationals?"

"You can be sure," Al said in reply, "that this operation is being planned and conducted by professionals in whom you can have complete confidence. You will take your orders from us. As I said previously, if you have any occasion to fly with foreign aircrews, none of them will ever be in command of the aircraft."

Ron Smith wanted to know if we would have to shoot any women and children. I think he may have phrased this question more circumspectly by referring to them as "civilians".

Al said all our targets would be military targets—which I thought was also quite circumpect. I noticed that the eyes in the two stone faces lingered an extra second or two on Ron before returning to the apparent contemplation of their belt buckles.

The only other questions were asked by two men at the far end of the table. Somehow

their questions evolved into discussions of details. I felt that this was a mistake. It was. Neither of these men was present at the second briefing.

Actually, there was nothing much to discuss. It was obvious that there was nothing we would be told that we didn't already know. As for the story of Al and his partners about being agents for a group of wealthy Cuban exiles—well, we just had to go along with the gag. The fact that we were being briefed at the Headquarters of the 117th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing of the Air National Guard made it quite clear that wealthy Cuban exiles were neither the architects nor the source of financing for the planned overthrow of the Castro government in Cuba.

Ten days later our same group, minus two, met once more at the 117th Tactical Reconnaissance Wing Headquarters. This time there was no round-table discussion. Also there was no more talk of wealthy Cuban exiles. In fact, we were told that we were now working for an electronics company located in one of the New England States. I will refrain from mentioning the name of the company because it may still be providing a front for similar activities.

At the second briefing each of us went singly into separate offices where we talked first with Jake and next with Hoyt. So far as I could tell neither had relaxed a muscle. Jake went over our cover stories with us. No one had shown much imagination. We had all invented opportunities to attend specialized schools that offered new and restricted instructions in some field of aviation or electronics. Of course none of our families or friends believed any of these stories. Who could? Everyone knew that the cover stories were cover stories. This would have worked out all right if everyone had gotten back home. But four of our group were shot down. A new story had to be created to cover that situation—which didn't work out so well.

Jake asked what cities we had chosen to "be from". Eventually we all received documents establishing us as residents, under phoney

names, of the cities of our choice, which were based, as per instructions, on at least a good working knowledge of the places involved.

After we finished with Jake, we went in to see Hoyt. Hoyt took care of the money, insurance and contractual details of our employment. Pilots were paid \$2,200 per month with \$600 per month additional for expenses. Other crew members were paid somewhat less. Insurance was available if we wanted it. The premiums would be deducted from our pay. The insurance provided was for \$15,000 of life insurance plus an indemnity of \$550 per month for life for the wife of anyone who lost his life. There was also a contract to be signed. I signed the contract and the insurance papers Hoyt put in front of me without reading any of them. Hoyt wanted to know how I wanted to be paid. I had several choices. I could be paid in cash every month, or I could have the money deposited in any bank I named, or by any combination of the two. Also, I could draw all or any part of my first month's salary in advance. I decided \$500 ought to tide me over for a few days. Hoyt opened an attache case that seemed to be filled with \$100 bills. He dealt five off the top of one of the stacks and passed them to me along with a receipt form. I decided that my expense money would take care of me in the field, and elected to have the \$2,200 deposited in my bank account in Birmingham each month. I had no idea what the mechanics of this transaction would be. When I returned home from Nicaragua in May, I discovered that this deposit had been made by a transfer of funds from a bank in St. Louis. No check was involved, and the identity of the payor was not revealed. The bank in St. Louis simply notified the bank in Birmingham that it had the funds for me and was transferring this amount to my account in Birmingham.

When we had all finished with Jake and Hoyt, Al gave us our final instructions. We were to leave Birmingham the next week and be checked in to the hotel in Miami not later than Sunday night. He asked that we leave Birmingham singly, or in pairs, and check into the hotel, where we would have reservations, the same way. We shook hands all around

and began to drift out of the building. Riley Shamburger and Hal McGee were in the parking lot outside.

"How'd you-all make out, Buck?" Riley asked.

"We're all squared away. We've got to be in Miami a week from Sunday. Are you two coming to Miami?"

"No. Hal and I have to go to Washington for a week. We'll see you when you get where you're going."

While we were talking Bill Peterson and Al Walters appeared. Al looked like a cat that had just swallowed half a dozen canaries.

"Do you know what this sonofabitch has got in his pocket?" Bill said.

"What?"

"He's got twenty-eight one hundred dollar bills."

When Al discovered he could draw a full months pay and expenses in advance, nothing less would do. He and Bill got into a car together and headed for the main gate, tires squealing.

"We'll be getting that bastard out of Jail in the morning," Riley said.

"We'll be getting *both* those bastards out of jail." Hal said.

We had become an organized group, bound by the common purpose we would serve, and restricted in our freedom to discuss our business with any but ourselves. None of us had known any of the others well—some not at all. Under the circumstances, it was natural that we should begin to congregate in the days before our departure for Miami. Mostly we met at the Airport Inn, a beer and barbecue place close to the airport. We drank a lot of beer. We compared notes on cover stories. We fought old wars, and told a lot of lies. We speculated endlessly on the invasion. Everyone had a new rumor every day, right from the horse's mouth. Al Walters strove mightily to reduce his twenty eight hundred dollars to a manageable level. We looked each other over and sized each other up. For the moment a fraternity was established—a fraternity

BAY OF PIGS

which had not existed before and, strangely perhaps, which would end when we all got back home.

If from a distance of six years it seems unusual that rumors of a U.S. sponsored invasion of Cuba should have been so easily generated and so readily accepted in January 1961, it must be remembered that all through 1960 and the first weeks in 1961, the nation's news media were filled with stories of Cuban exile activities in Florida and Central America, and with charges and counter charges from nearly every quarter of the globe concerning the aggressive and hostile intentions of the United States Government with respect to the Castro regime.

While most of the nation's press (and probably large segments of the general public) had pictured Castro as a kind of modern-day political Robin Hood during the period when he and his handful of followers were holed up in the Sierra Maestra, the disenchantment was sudden and complete after he arrived in power in Havana and began to start each day by lining up a dozen or so political prisoners against a wall and shooting them before breakfast. In the first few months of 1959 Castro thus disposed of more than 450 members of the former Batista regime.

As early as April, 1960, after only fifteen months in power, Castro had inspired organized opposition among his fellow Cubans. The Movement of Revolutionary Recovery (MRR) got underway on April 10, 1960, with a call to Cubans to take up arms against the Castro government. Membership in the MRR included many of Castro's former supporters—in and out of government. Throughout the hemisphere governments began looking over their hands in an effort to determine exactly what they had been dealt. While they were trying to decide, propaganda barrages were laid down from all quarters.

On April 25, 1960, Cuban Foreign Minister Raul Roa announced that an armed invasion from Guatemala was imminent. He accused Guatemala's President Ydigoras of conspiring with the United Fruit Company.

On April 28, 1960, Guatemala severed diplomatic relations with Cuba. President Ydigoras said Castro was preparing subversive moves against Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua.

(March 17, 1960, has been reported as the date President Eisenhower made his decision to lend U.S. support to an effort to overthrow the Castro regime in Cuba.)

On May 1, following a May Day parade, Castro talked for 3 1/2 hours, telling 250,000 Cubans that the U.S. State Department had engineered a plot with Guatemala designed to accuse Cuba as a major aggressor before the OAS. He said the purpose of this plot was to justify the invasion of Cuba. He referred to President Ydigoras' "absurb charge" that troops were being trained in the Sierra Maestra to invade Guatemala. "We have the news," said Castro, "that the State Department is preparing an aggression against Cuba through Guatemala."

Thus it went through the summer and fall in 1960. In May President Ydigoras announced that he was initiating continuous guerilla training maneuvers in answer to the threat of Cuban invasion. Ydigoras said that President Morales of Honduras had informed him that communist guerilla bands were being organized and trained by Cubans on the Guatemala-Honduras border.

On July 7, 1960, Assistant Secretary of State A. A. Berle said:

"For all practical purposes Cuba is just as much a communist nation as Hungary or North Korea. The island republic has been converted into not only a spearhead of Soviet and Chinese propaganda, but also a potential base for Soviet and Chinese power.

"The clique dominating Cuba intends direct aggression against the rest of Latin America with Soviet and Chinese support. . . . The United States and any Latin American countries that care to join (I believe most would do so), should be prepared to oppose by all necessary means any movements or governments that are manipulated overtly or covertly by forces outside the hemisphere. . . . What I am suggesting is not intervention but defense."

BIRMINGHAM

Three days later Premier Khrushchev got into the act. In a Moscow speech Khrushchev stated that the USSR would retaliate with rockets if the United States intervened militarily in Cuba. "The United States even now is plotting insidious and criminal steps against Cuba," Khrushchev said.

To this President Eisenhower replied that the United States would never permit "the establishment of a regime dominated by international communism in the western hemisphere." At the same time he accused Khrushchev of attempting to transform Cuba into a Soviet instrument, and he warned that "definite action" by the United States would be called for if Cuba, or any other country in the western hemisphere, fell under the control of international communism.

So, as early as July, 1960, Assistant Secretary Berle had labeled Cuba a soviet satellite, warned that Cuba had become a potential base for subversion of the western hemisphere by international communism, and said that the United States must be prepared to oppose this by "all necessary means." President Eisenhower had said that the United States would not permit the establishment of a communist regime in this hemisphere, and he warned that "definite action" would be taken by the United States if this were attempted.

There seems to be nothing ambiguous in either of these statements. They state quite clearly what the attitude of the United States government was at that time, and what we intended to do about the situation rapidly developing in Cuba if it continued. It was at about this time that an American construction company, Thompson-Cornwall, began work on the 5,000-ft airfield at Retalhuleu, Guatemala.

The Retalhuleu air base was used to supply the Cuban exile forces training in the mountains on the Pacific coast of Guatemala, and it was from this base that these forces, their equipment and supplies, were transported to the invasion's staging base at Puerto Cabeza, Nicaragua. Obviously the plans and decisions necessary to put this operation into effect had been made some months earlier.

Accusations, recriminations and charges and counter-charges continued to fill the air throughout the summer of 1960 and into the fall. In Moscow on October 25 a commentator for the Soviet press agency, Tass, said that an invasion force equipped with American arms was building up in Guatemala. On the same day the Guatemalan government rejected an accusation by a student group in Quezaltenango (less than 100 miles from Retalhuleu) that anti-Castro Cubans and North Americans were preparing an invasion of Cuba in Guatemalan territory.

On October 28 President Ydigoras said that "Guatemala does not need nor is it offering sites for foreign bases. Neither has any friendly nation requested permission to establish bases on national territory."

In the United Nations on November 1, Cuba proposed a debate on charges that the United States was backing invasion plans. This proposal was voted down after a move by the United States to send the proposals to the United Nations political committee for debate. Cuba and the Soviet bloc nations accused the United States of stalling maneuvers to give the United States time to complete plans for the invasion from bases in Florida and Guatemala.

By mid-November, 1960, the existence and the activities at the air base in Retalhuleu had become widely known. In answer to questions about this base President Ydigoras said: ". . . it was one of several established in a program designed to re-orient military training in Guatemala toward guerilla warfare." He denied emphatically that the project was subsidized by the United States and branded as a "lot of lies" reports that the base at Retalhuleu had been established with U.S. assistance as a training ground for military action against Cuba.

President Eisenhower severed diplomatic relations with Cuba on January 3, 1961. At that time it was believed in some diplomatic circles that this move might lead the newly emerging nations of the world to believe that there was some basis for Cuban charges that

the United States was planning some aggression against Cuba. State Department officials, however, did not share these views. It was their opinion that the Cuban Foreign Minister had nothing to back up his charges. Commenting on the break in U. S. diplomatic relations with Cuba, Roa had said: "The purpose is obvious: to undermine and disfigure the character of the Cuban revolution in order to set the subjective and objective groundwork for direct military action; in other words, the glorious victory of Guatemala of 1954 is to be re-edited and repeated. At this moment Cuba is immediately threatened by invasion by the United States.

"Material from North America was airlifted to counter-revolutionary groups operating in the mountains. . . camps of mercenaries are maintained in Florida and Central America and paid for with American dollars. The CIA foots the bill for a systematic campaign of calumny from different broadcasting stations and this is part of the psychological warfare which has been unleashed in order to prepare conditions for a wide-scale assault.

"Although the Central Intelligence Agency has very often changed its plans and postponed them, we have accurate information that we are now facing the final blow."

To which statement U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations James J. Wadsworth, replied on January 4 as follows:

"In these false and hysterical charges which have been laid before the Security Council by the Cuban government, we have a fresh reminder of the strategy of harassment by which they brought us. . . and I think definitely on purpose. . . to last night's decision.

"The United States has nothing to hide and nothing to fear from these charges. They are false and cannot stand the light of day. If anybody has reason to fear a debate on this subject it is the Cuban leaders themselves who have been crying 'wolf' for the past six months over an alleged 'imminent invasion' of their country, and thereby are fast making themselves ridiculous in the eyes of the world.

"It is the same midnight brew, dipped from the same cauldron of hysteria.

"I reject categorically the ridiculous charges of the Cuban government."

It was at about this time that I made my first contact with Riley Shamburger in Birmingham. There was little doubt in my mind that Riley's proposal involved an effort—legitimate, as he described it—against Castro's government in Cuba.

Published reports about Cuban exile activity had not been confined to the daily battle of words in the United Nations, however. The 1960 presidential campaign had gotten underway in the summer of 1960 and was picking up steam during the fall months prior to election day in November.

In a campaign speech on October 20, John F. Kennedy called for U.S. aid to fighters for freedom inside Cuba and in exile "who are seeking to overthrow the Castro regime."

Two days later, on October 22, his opponent, Vice President Richard Nixon, said that Kennedy's statement was a "shockingly reckless proposal that might lead to World War III." In a speech at Chester, Pennsylvania, Nixon called Kennedy's proposal for United States government support for a revolution in Cuba the "most shockingly irresponsible proposal ever made in our history by a presidential candidate during a campaign." On October 23, Vice President Nixon sent Kennedy a telegram, which he made public, in which he said. . . "Thus it is clear that you and I are diametrically opposed in a matter of great public interest and one which the next President may have to deal with as soon as he assumes office. It is my firm belief that the course of action you propose is dangerously reckless, because it violates U.S. government solemn commitments to the OAS and the UN not to interfere in the internal affairs of other members of these organizations. Your proposals will alienate everyone of our sister American states. . . and give Khrushchev valid excuses to intervene on the side of the Castro government. If this happens your policy could lead to World War III."

The above shot was fired by a candidate who expected to assume the office of President and already *knew* he would have to deal with the very question he was castigating his opponent for raising. Who knows what Kennedy himself knew at this time?

Kennedy's campaign strategists, apparently spooked by the vehemence of the Vice President's reaction, went on the air that night. In a television speech Robert Kennedy said that his brother's statement had been widely misinterpreted. "He is not suggesting armed intervention in Cuba," Robert Kennedy said, "or the fact that we arm people so they can land in Cuba. Nothing in this statement indicates as much."

Activity at the air base in Retalhuleu, Guatemala, was increasing daily, as were reports about training camps in the mountains to the southeast. Although reporters were not permitted near these bases, B-26's and C-54's were very much in evidence at Retalhuleu and formation flights of B-26's were almost a daily occurrence. Guatemalan authorities now admitted that U.S. personnel were being used as instructors, but they still insisted that the troops in training were Guatemalan troops. The Guatemalan government said that there were Cubans present, but that they were also instructors.

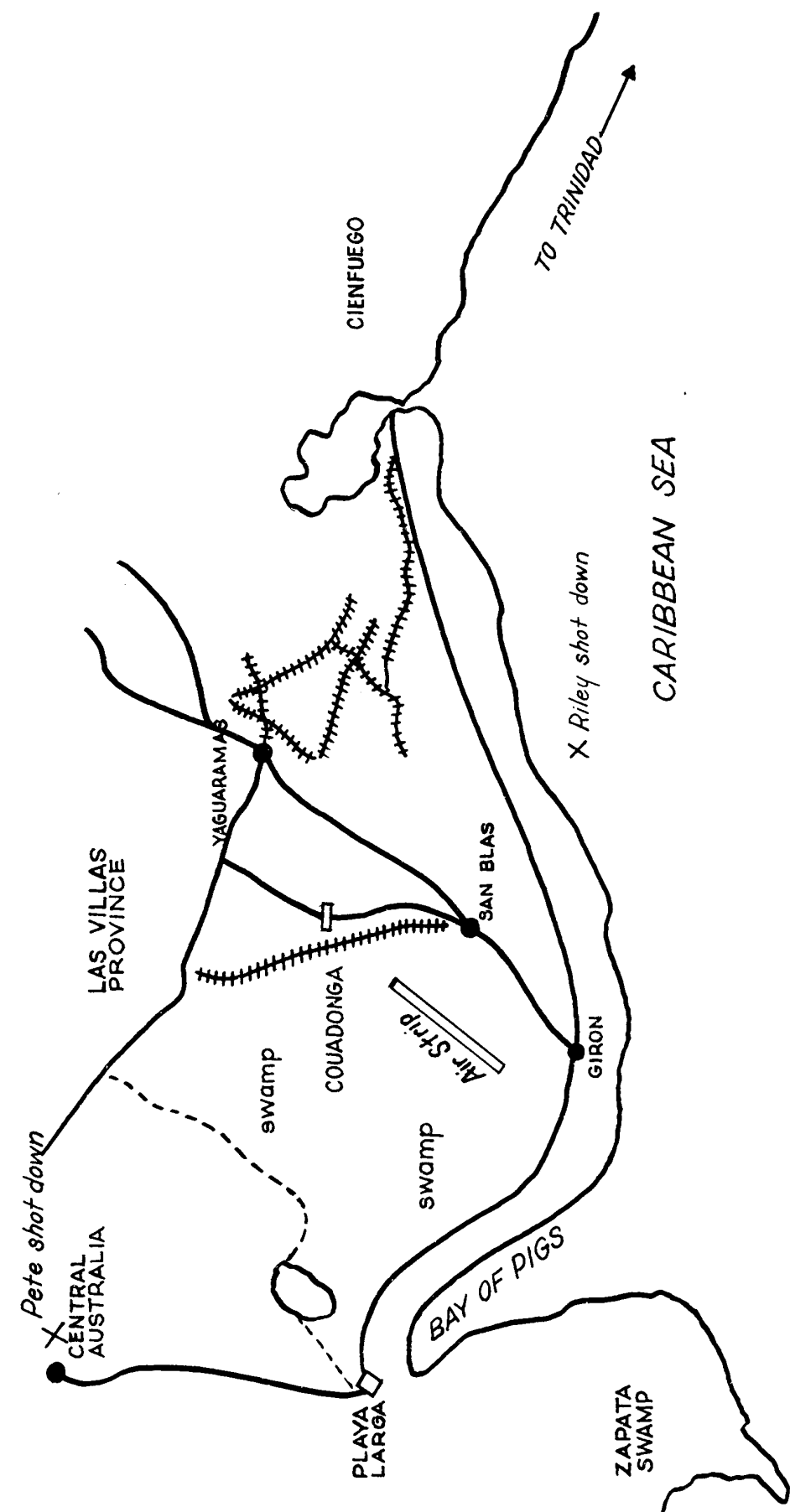
The Guatemalan government also stressed the defensive nature of the training being carried on with financial and technical assistance of the United States, and it denied the assertions by opponents of President Ydigoras that the military preparations in evidence were a part of a plan for offensive action against Castro. In Washington on January 10, State Department Press Officer R. Lincoln White said, in reply to a question about activities in Guatemala. "As to the report of a specific base, I know absolutely nothing about it."

During this same period Miami residents who lived near the abandoned Opalaka Navy Air Base were frequently awakened at night by low flying aircraft taking off and landing

at the blacked-out airfield. When newspapers in Miami carried reports of these activities, it became a practice with many Miami residents to drive out to the field at night and watch as unlighted four-engine transports departed with a roar low over the tops of the cars parked around the perimeter road. Arriving aircraft came in out of the night with a sudden sound of throttled engines directly overhead, a brief outline of wings and fuselage reflecting the blue flames of engine exhausts, and the squeel of rubber against concrete as the aircraft touched down on the darkened runway. Questioned by a reporter about the night flights into and out of Opalaka, Edward P. Ahrens, District Director of the U.S. Border Patrol, said, "Nothing has come to my attention."

Cuban exiles, who had been pouring into Florida by the thousands for more than 12 months, had created a "little Havana" of the Flagler Street and Biscayne Boulevard area in downtown Miami. Recruiting activities in this area were poorly disguised—if at all. The forthcoming military effort to overthrow Castro was the subject of constant speculation and conversation. Among the thousands of Cubans who had found their way out of Cuba and into Florida were hundreds of agents and informers for the Castro government. Whatever anyone else knew and talked about in Miami, they knew—and told Castro.

Two years after the invasion at the Bay of Pigs, Attorney General Robert Kennedy stated publicly that decisions by the President at that time (the effect of which was to insure the failure of the invasion) were motivated by the surfacing of the role of the United States during the first hours of the invasion. This is a rather incredible explanation. Even the most casual examination of newspaper stories and published reports available to the public, which had accumulated for an entire year before the invasion, makes it abundantly clear that the role of the United States government had "surfaced" long before April 15, 1961.



FLORIDA

Everyone left Birmingham singly and in pairs as requested. However, about ten of us wound up on the same flight out of Atlanta. We arrived at the hotel in downtown Miami in the same formation. The lobby was crowded when we checked in. There was no reason for us to feel conspicuous, but we did. Ernie asked the desk clerk about our reservations. The rest of us crowded up to the desk behind Ernie looking conspiratorial and self-conscious. The clerk took one look at all of us and started craning his head around to see behind us in the lobby. Maybe he thought we were all trying to sneak women into our rooms. All of our rooms were on the same floor and were connecting. I paired off with Ron Smith; everyone parked his luggage, and within thirty minutes we were all gathered in one room. Our only instructions had been to check in and wait. We sat up until three in the morning. We were very green at the time, and we thought people were sitting on the edges of their chairs waiting for us to arrive in Miami.

Next morning after breakfast we sat around the lobby, wandered in and out of the hotel bar, and out onto Biscayne Boulevard where there seemed to be more people speaking Spanish than English. Downtown Miami was crawling with exile Cubans. They gath-

ered on street corners and stood around outside small cafes and bars talking excitedly, gesturing wildly, and contributing greatly to the general atmosphere of tension and intrigue which pervaded Miami in 1961.

Shortly after noon, Red Cornish, Sandy Sanders and Leo Baker disappeared in search of friends of Red who lived on Miami Beach and who, according to him "used to own a big yacht". Three or four other men went up the street to a movie; another group staked out a dark corner in the cocktail lounge; Neilson, Chapman, Ealey, King and I settled down on the veranda just off the lobby where we could keep an eye on the pedestrian traffic on Biscayne Boulevard—a good part of which was made up of young ladies, quite deserving of our attention, going back and forth from their places of employment on their lunch hour.

Gordon Neilson was a rope-thin man in his early forties who had been employed as a test pilot by Hayes Aircraft Corporation in Birmingham. He had also been a fighter pilot and an instructor at an Air Force instrument flying training school. He was two or three inches less than six feet tall, but gave the impression of being lean and lanky. He looked like a long distance runner, which is exactly

what he was—not in a competitive sense, for Gordon ran only in the interest of what he called “staying in shape.” Gordon didn’t drink and he didn’t smoke, and, if he could, he ran five miles every day. There were very few times or places where he allowed anything to interfere with his daily canter. Even in Retalhuleu and Puerto Cabeza, where we were restricted to the narrow confines of the air base, Gordon went out every afternoon and jogged up and down the runway. The temperature and humidity were always in the nineties, which made this a painful performance to watch. Gordon guarded his money as carefully as he did his health. It is entirely possible that he still has most of the first dollar he ever earned salted away somewhere. He was always pleasant about his parsimony, however, and he took a lot of ribbing with unruffled good humor. But he was insistent. If there was a restaurant tab or a grocery bill to be shared, it was shared absolutely equally, even if it meant getting a nickel changed into five pennies in order to carry the final accounting out to the last decimal place. Anyone who added a tip to a tab shared by Gordon, did so at his own risk and for his own account. The important thing about Gordon, though, was that he was as meticulous about his flying as he was about his health and his money. He was not only one of the most skillful pilots in our group, he was always ready to go no matter what the circumstances.

Fred Ealey was strictly a loner. He was the only one of our group who insisted on a room by himself in Miami, and he lived alone when we moved to Fort Lauderdale later. Fred was a big man. His short, straight black hair grew low on his forehead to a point where it almost met a pair of bushy black eyebrows that ran together across the bridge of his nose. The bone structure of Fred’s face was massive and so arranged that Gordon and I nicknamed him *Pithecanthropus Erectus*—but *not* to his face. If all this suggests that Fred was sullen, he was not. But where the rest of us were voluble and garrulous about our previous histories and past experiences, Fred had practically nothing to say. Other than the fact that his home was somewhere in Louisiana, no one

ever learned anything about his background or through what channels or connections he had become a part of our contingent. It may be there had been some freakish error or foul-up in communications, because it eventually became rather apparent that Fred had not only never flown a C-54, the chances are that he had never flown *anything* with four engines. If this were true, Fred was not going to let it interfere with the opportunity to take part in the operation—if he could help it.

Phil Chapman and Ernie King had known each other during the Korean War when they had both been attached to the same military air transport squadron. It was through Ernie that General Doster had recruited Phil. He had no current military status, like the rest of us, and he had not flown since the end of the Korean conflict. Phil was a highly successful manager of an insurance agency in a large mid-western city and, like Fred, may have bitten off almost more than he could chew for the moment. Phil was tall, dark, handsome, finicky and a little soft. Phil was the kind who never found the service in a restaurant quite up to his standards; the Filet Mignon was never quite rare enough, and no bartender ever made a Martini quite dry enough to suit him. Phil was an ex-tiger. He enjoyed fond memories of a day, long since past, when he prowled the jungle with the best of them. Now he was a middle-aged tom cat who still sounded good on the back fence but was a little short on performance when all the cats squared off in the alley. He was intrigued mostly with the *idea* of what we were doing. He liked being a part of the scene, and he felt that he was well cast in his role, but I believe Phil looked forward to the curtain call with far more excitement than to the show itself.

Ernie was glad to have Phil along, if only for the ride. Ernie had a compulsion to establish himself. He was already established with Phil from the days they had served together in the Korean War. Now it became necessary for him to discover a precise location in his personal criteria for everyone else. Hopefully, it would be possible to locate everyone some-

where lower down on the scale from him. Ernie’s sole criteria was “flying time”, and he seemed to believe that this was everyone else’s criteria. He believed that if he had more “flying time” than anyone else, this would automatically project him into the position of leadership for which he longed. If some little green men had appeared with a request to “take us to your leader”, Ernie would have wanted them marched straight to him. Ernie lobbied persistently to establish in everyone’s mind the proposition that he had at least a thousand hours more flying time than anyone else—no matter what the figure might be, and he found ways to divert any conversation, on any subject, into channels where he could get the information he needed. There was no requirement, of course, in our set-up for anyone to assume “authority”, nor any opportunity to exercise it. We were hired for one purpose—to drive airplanes. We all recognized Ernie’s compulsion, however, and we went out of our way to nurture it. Instead of hanging around the hotel for hours on end waiting for a “contact”, we let Ernie do it. When we went over to Miami Beach for a swim we left Ernie at the hotel to make the contacts and to pass on all the instructions to us. Wherever we went we found a telephone and called back to give Ernie a number where he could reach us. He loved it. So did we. And, of course, we made certain that *nobody* had more flying time than Ernie.

Ernie’s first opportunity to round us all up came on our third afternoon in Miami. I was on the beach with some of the other pilots when his call came. Contact had been made with Ernie. We were all to meet with a Company representative at 8 o’clock that night at the hotel.

The Company representative’s name was Jim. (There seemed to be a lot of people in the CIA named Jim). Beginning next morning we would all have to take the “black box” treatment, as Jim referred to the lie detector test. Jim said that if there were any of us who didn’t want to take the test, for any reason, we were free to decline and to drop out of the program with no hard feelings. I think this suggestion was itself a part of the treatment.

Springing a lie detector test on us, out of the blue, may have been designed to eliminate the *necessity* for the test if there were any among us who knew in advance that this was an obstacle that could not be successfully hurdled. No one rose to this bait, but, as it later developed, there was one of our group who may have given some serious thought to accepting the offer.

Jim couldn’t tell us anything about when we might be moving on. His advice was to “sit tight.” We’d be hearing something in a few days. Several of us were running out of money. We suggested to Jim that if our stay in Miami were going to be extended for more than a few days it might be well for him to pump up our money clips. Jim left the room and came back in a short time with the inevitable attache case filled with one hundred dollar bills. Those of us who had been too modest in anticipating our requirements before leaving Birmingham drew another advance. If the handling of money sounds haphazard and random, it was not. All of the advances of money made at intervals by various individuals was accounted for to the penny in the final accounting. At the time, we were all naturally entranced by what seemed to be an inexhaustible supply of hundred dollar bills on which we apparently could draw at will. But somewhere beyond our ken there was an accounting office that managed to keep track of the flow.

The polygraph tests took two days. Ernie and Jim had set up a schedule allowing an hour for each man. As with so many other of our Company contacts, when the tests were finished we never saw Jim again.

My turn on the machine came in the afternoon of the first day. As each man finished his test he notified the next man on the list, who went up to a room on the eighth floor and knocked on the door. We were admitted by a professorial looking gentleman who explained that he was a member of a Chicago firm retained to conduct the tests by our employers in accordance with their requirements. These introductory remarks were made to establish his ignorance of the nature of our employer’s

FLORIDA

business and, obviously, to cut off any possible discussion of matters other than the immediate business at hand. By now, of course, we were all thoroughly adjusted to operating in these vacuums where no one knew anything about anything—even to the point at times where they didn't seem to be entirely sure who *they* were themselves.

The operator explained briefly how the machine worked and how effective it was. To demonstrate, after I was all hooked up, he asked me my wife's name—which is Joan. "Now," he said, "I am going to use a series of names, including your wife's real name, I will ask you each time if your wife's name is so-and-so. I want you to answer 'no' to each question."

We started the demonstration.

"Is your wife's name Pat?"

"No."

"Is your wife's name Gloria?"

"No."

"Is your wife's name Joan?"

"No."

Etc., etc.

When we were all through he showed me where a needle writing in red ink on a drum of graph paper had gone wild when I answered "no" to the question "Is your wife's name Joan?"

I was suitably impressed. Apparently this machine could detect even a make-believe lie designed to deceive no one and uttered with out any emotional strain that I was conscious of.

Next, the operator explained that we would go over each of the series of questions in the test without having the machine in operation. In the course of this first interrogation I was free to answer each question at length, qualifying and explaining anything I wanted to. After which, with the polygraph operating, the same questions would be asked again, prefaced by "other than what you have already told me." Answers to the final questions would be a simple "yes" or "no"—"no" being the only correct answer.

Sample questions were: "Have you ever lived or traveled in a foreign country?" "Have you ever been a member of the Communist Party or any organization affiliated with the communist movement?" "Have you ever been arrested or convicted of a felony?" "Have you ever practiced homosexuality or bestiality?" "Have you ever used an assumed name, an alias?" "Do any of your relatives live in a foreign country?" etc. etc.

The operator explained that my employers were not interested in passing judgment, and that my continued employment was not necessarily related to the answers, but if there *were* anything in my background which could be used against me by hostile interests, my employers wanted that information in order to eliminate any such possible source of pressure. In other words, I gathered, if I were a homosexual, or if I had a prison term hidden somewhere in my past, the Company wanted to know it. If I knew that the *Company* knew all such dark secrets, no one else would be able to blackmail me. It sounded logical enough, but I doubt if it was all really that cut and dried. One of our number departed very suddenly a short time later. It is possible that the "black box" had uncovered something the Company decided it could not buy.

One difference between the final test and the rehearsal was a long pause inserted between the questions. When you had answered "no" there was a fifteen or twenty second moment of silence before the next question came. During this interval anyone who had held back during the previous discussion period would find it hard to divert his thoughts to anything but what he was trying to hide, and the machine would react accordingly. It did with me, although I was not trying to hide anything. During one of these pauses I thought of something I had failed to mention previously.

The question was: "Other than what you have already told me, have you ever used an assumed name or an alias?"

My immediate response was "no", but in the pause that followed I suddenly recalled

an evening twenty-five years earlier when my brother and I had picked up a couple of girls down by the Washington Monument. For some perverse reason we spent the evening with them as the "Abernathy" brothers. The polygraph needle started to climb the wall and we had to halt proceedings while I explained the incident.

"See what I mean?" the professor said.

We finished with the polygraph tests the next afternoon, and that night we were called together again by Ernie to meet with "Jack". By now Ernie was well established as our "bell cow". Sweating and twinkling like a chubby little gnome he bustled around the hotel all day long happy as a brand new lance-corporal.

Jack had two sets of orders—one for the B-26 pilots, another for the C-54 crews. The two groups were separating the next day. Bill Peterson, Al Walters, Don Gordon, Joe Harbert, Pete Ray and Ron Smith were leaving Miami the next night for a flight to Guatemala. They were instructed to set out first thing in the morning and acquire new clothes. They were given a list of items they would need—two or three pairs of khaki trousers, T-shirts, underwear, a light jacket, socks, high, lace boots and a good hunting knife. Jack emphasized that the knife and the boots should be of the best quality. When they had made these purchases the men were to return to the hotel, cut the labels off all the clothing, don one set, pack the rest into a plain duffle bag and be ready to leave the hotel at eight o'clock. Everything else, other than shaving gear, was to be packed in the suitcases we had arrived with in Miami.

The C-54 crews were instructed to rent an automobile next morning and proceed to Fort Lauderdale where we were to find living quarters. After which we were instructed to report back to the hotel in Miami the next night.

There were too many of us for one car, so next morning we rented two. Ernie King, Phil Chapman, Gordon Neilson, Earl Carter and I used one car. Leo Baker, Jack Vernon, Sandy Sanders, Wade Gray and Red Cornish used another. Our "loner", Fred Ealey,

BAY OF PIGS

rented a car for himself and found his own quarters in Fort Lauderdale.

We met for breakfast in the hotel coffee shop next morning to make our plans. We decided that if suitable accommodations could be found, the pilots would take an apartment together and the other crew members—flight engineers and radio operators—would live together in another apartment. This arrangement was natural enough, but of course Leo immediately detected the formation of a class strata.

"The next thing you know you bastards will be trying to pull rank on us," he said.

"Why don't you get your ass off your shoulders, Leo?" Gordon asked. "If it will prove anything, I'll shack up with you in a motel room."

"Thanks, but you're not my type."

Another argument developed over whether we should find accommodations on the beach or somewhere in town. Opinions ranged all the way from Gordon's, who thought the YMCA at \$1.50 a day would serve our purposes more than adequately, to Phil's, who liked the idea of a suite at a beach-front hotel. Since we were paying our own expenses, the consensus was a compromise. The two groups agreed to meet at a bar in Fort Lauderdale, cool off for an hour or so, and then explore an area two or three blocks back from the beach where there were numerous modestly appointed apartment-hotels. When we reached Fort Lauderdale it took us a little longer to cool off than we had anticipated, and it was well into the afternoon before we set out on a search for living quarters. Fortunately there was a vacancy at the first place where we stopped—a small, two story apartment building with ten one-bedroom units and a small pool. The owner-managers were a Mr. and Mrs. Harding who had retired and moved from Indiana to Florida several years before. Although most of the other tenants were contemporaries of the Hardings who came down to Fort Lauderdale for two weeks or a month every winter, they were unperturbed by the sight of ten men filing through the entrance to their small office. They readily agreed to

put five of us into their vacant apartment. A phone call to an apartment across the street soon had the other five established in a similar unit. Each apartment had a bedroom with two single beds, a living room with two sofas that made into beds, a bathroom, kitchenette and dining area. Each group solved the problem of the fifth man by adding a fold-away cot in the bedroom. We paid a week's rent in advance, said that we would move in in the next day or two, and were on our way back to Miami by 4 o'clock in the afternoon. We were somewhat disappointed that we had not had an opportunity to use the elaborate cover story we had contrived to explain our presence and activities in Fort Lauderdale. It seemed that no one could have cared less.

When we arrived back at the hotel in Miami we found the B-26 group packed, dressed in fatigues and boots, and in the process of checking out. "Erick" was in charge this time.

"Gentlemen, you're late," Erick said. "These men are scheduled to depart the airport in an hour. Have you found accommodations in Fort Lauderdale?"

Erick was precise and formal. We learned later that he was an Air Force Major on detached duty with the Company. He was completely devoid of humor and took himself very, very seriously. In spite of the fact that most of us were several years older than Erick, and more widely experienced as pilots, he always addressed us as if he were speaking to a group of aviation cadets. We got the feeling that he would have liked for us to come to attention when he entered the room—which he did at regular intervals after we moved to Fort Lauderdale. Perversely, we went to the opposite extreme. Whenever he showed up, we made a big production of popping open cans of beer, mixing drinks to the accompaniment of a loud rattling of ice in glasses, stifling prodigious yawns, and stretching out flat on the sofa in the middle of his pontifications. In general we did everything possible to convey an attitude of not-quite-polite and somewhat bored attention. Erick's attitude made it obvious that he didn't really

consider us "gentlemen", and for some reason we went out of our way to help him cultivate this impression.

"I've seen a lot of GI bastards in my time," said Red Cornish, "but this is goddamdest tin soldier I've ever run in to."

"I'll bet the son-of-a-bitch sleeps at attention," Leo said.

"Or parade rest," Gordon said.

We gave Erick the addresses of our apartments in Fort Lauderdale.

"You will check out of here in the morning," Erick said, "proceed to Fort Lauderdale and wait there for further instructions. I will be back in contact with you in the next day or two. Now, gentlemen," turning to the B-26 group, "I think we'd better be on our way."

We shook hands all around and Erick and the five B-26 pilots filed out of the hotel room, suitcases in one hand, duffle bags slung over their shoulders, shiny new boots creaking down the carpeted hall.

"That is certainly an inconspicuous group," I said.

"About as inconspicuous as elephant tracks," Fred Ealey said.

The B-26 pilots went direct from the Opalaka airport to Retalhuleu. Next morning the C-54 crews checked out of the hotel, "proceeded" to Fort Lauderdale as per Erick's orders, and waited further instructions for three days. We filled in the time with trips to the supermarket, the liquor store and the beach. Our apartments were three blocks from the beach. Gordon put on a sweat suit every afternoon and ran up and down the beach for an hour. Fred Ealey checked with us at the apartment every day, but otherwise didn't fraternize. In fact, we didn't even know where he was living. There was some talk that he might be shackled up with a girl friend and, consequently, was giving us a wide berth. This possibility seemed so remote as to be worthy of no serious consideration. "Anything that would get into bed with him has already been extinct for twenty-five thousand years," Gordon said.

Late in the afternoon on the third day after we arrived in Fort Lauderdale, Erick came to the apartment with another man whose name was "Ray." Only Gordon and Ernie were in the apartment when they arrived. Fred had checked in earlier and departed. Phil was at a Turkish night club a few blocks away. Earl Carter and I were at the beach. When we came in Erick, Ray, Ernie and Gordon were sitting at the dinette table. Erick introduced us to Ray, but Ray and Earl already knew one another. In fact, they had been in the same class at flying school as cadets and later had served together for a short while in the same squadron. This was apparently an unanticipated development and it may have been responsible for Earl's sudden departure. When we came in from flying the next afternoon we found Earl, who had not gone with us to the airport, busy packing his suitcase. All he knew, and all we ever learned, was that Erick had come by in the morning and told him he had orders from Washington for Earl to return home. Earl said that Erick couldn't give him any reason for his sudden elimination from the program. The only thing Erick ever told us was that he had been instructed to "send that man back home." We thought it must have had something to do with the lie detector tests in Miami, but it may also have been because Earl had "uncovered" Ray. Earl didn't seem to be too unhappy, and Ray was immediately reassigned.

Erick explained that Ray would act as our instructor for a short period of orientation flying on the C-54 beginning the next morning. However, the next morning it was not Ray who picked us up at the apartment, but "Mac" and "Les." Mac was a pilot in the Air Force on duty with the Company. Les was a Petty Officer and flight engineer in the Navy, also detached to the Company. Les would be responsible for instruction of our flight engineers. We didn't see Ray again until April in Retalhuleu where he showed up to assist in the big airlift of the invasion forces to Puerto Cabeza.

We set up a schedule of six-hour training flights that started at six o'clock every morning (or six at night). Three pilots and two

flight engineers were on each flight. Each pilot flew for a two-hour period. The flight engineers, who didn't have quite as much to do, alternated for three hour periods. Jack Vernon and Wade Gray, who were radio operators, accompanied us often enough to become familiar with the radio equipment aboard the C-54. Their ultimate duties and responsibilities remained obscure.

One afternoon we returned from the field to find Ferd Dutton unpacking at the apartment. Ferd was a navigator from California. By now we had completely adopted a Company practice of never asking anyone anything about himself. So we never asked or learned how, why or by whom Ferd had been assigned to our group. We immediately dubbed him Ferdinand Magellan. Ferd was to be the only American flyer to land on Cuban shores and return to tell about it. Ferd made a few training flights with us, but primarily the concentration was on pilot proficiency and crew training.

The C-54 is the military version of the Douglas DC-4, a four-engine transport which first saw service in World War II and later, along with the equally famous Lockheed Constellation, was used extensively in commercial airline operations. The DC-4 is the forerunner of the DC-6 and the DC-7 which are somewhat larger and faster.

With the possible exception of Fred Ealey, all of us had had extensive experience on four-engine aircraft. Ernie and Phil had flown C-54's in the Korean War. Gordon had been a test pilot on C-124's at an Air Force modification center, and I had flown B-17's and B-24's. The purpose of the training period in Florida was to bring us all to a state of high proficiency and familiarity with the C-54 and its systems so that we would be able to get maximum performance from the aircraft under conditions where a maximum performance would be required.

There is considerably more to the operation of a large aircraft than meets the eye of even the most experienced air traveler whose contact with the craft is limited to a seat in the cabin while he is being transported from A

to B. An aircraft becomes airborne when the flow of air over the wings reaches a velocity sufficient to reduce air pressure to a point where the resulting lift overcomes the force of gravity and the aircraft breaks free from the ground. Those of us who studied physics in high school will remember the principle as Bernoulli's Theorem, which states that when a gas is in motion, the pressure decreases as the speed increases. Airflow over the wings and tail surfaces of an aircraft is created as it is pulled through the air by its propeller, or propellers. In principle there is no difference between a piper cub and a DC-8 jet. However, the larger the weight to be lifted from the ground the more wing area and/or air speed required. The maximum weight of the C-54 fully loaded is 36.5 tons. The wing span is 40 yards—almost half the length of a football field—and from nose to tail it measures 94 feet. Not one engine, but four are required to produce enough power to drive the aircraft over the ground at a speed where it will become airborne. Sometimes almost a mile of paved runway is required to reach this airspeed, with the four engines generating a total of 5,800 horse power. So, while in principle every aircraft is the same, in practice the pilot's job on a large aircraft is considerably more complicated and demanding than it is on a small single-engine aircraft.

The key to sustained flight is power. To lose power in a surface craft simply brings a halt to forward movement. If you're on land you step out and make repairs or send for help. On the water you stay afloat, you don't sink. When an aircraft loses power, however, the flight is not interrupted, it is ended. Unlike the surface craft, the aircraft does not remain at rest in the sky at the point where a power failure occurred. It returns to earth—not completely out of control, of course, for as long as enough speed in descent can be maintained the wings will provide lift and the aircraft will respond to the flight controls. It will bank and turn and fly. At the surface it will maintain straight and level flight until the airspeed bleeds off and no longer provides lift for the wings—a matter of seconds. At this point it is no longer an

aircraft, and the place where it crunches back to earth is a place below that part of the sky where the power failed. This is not often a spot where surface conditions are such that several tons of aluminum and steel can be brought to a final rest in one piece. It is understandable, then, that aircraft engines are maintained with meticulous care and operated with a precision and attention to detail that would not only be unthinkable but impossible for the operator of even the most sophisticated piece of automotive equipment.

The cockpit of an aircraft is an engine control room, an electrical and radio control center, and the navigator's and the captain's bridge. There are controls which meter the flow of fuel to the engines; controls to maintain constant cylinder head and oil temperatures; controls to maintain a constant fuel-air ratio; controls to vary the pitch of the propeller blades; controls to maintain carburetor air temperatures above freezing; controls to provide extra boost for the engines at high altitudes where the air is thin, and many, many more. For each set of controls there are corresponding dials and gauges on the instrument panel which display the temperatures and pressures in each engine and which reflect instantly any changes which might harbor trouble or malfunction of an engine component.

In addition to engine instruments and controls, there are also flight instruments by which the pilot can determine precisely the attitude and movement of the aircraft in relation to the earth below. Often there is no visual reference to the earth or to the sky. There is no physical sensation of speed or motion. There is nothing, in fact, but the cockpit, the controls, the instruments and the mind's eye to convince the pilot that he is indeed 9,500 feet above the surface of the earth below, that the wings of the aircraft are level with an invisible horizon, and that the aircraft, of which he has become practically an integral part, is moving through the air at a constant rate of speed directly toward a specific geographical location somewhere miles ahead.

It is possible today, by means of highly sophisticated radio navigation facilities, to lose

sight of the ground immediately after take off, steer a course so accurately, and maneuver the aircraft so precisely, that the first glimpse of the earth after flying a thousand miles will be the approach end of a runway half a mile ahead and two hundred feet below the nose of the aircraft. The electronic controls and the instruments which provide visual representations of radio signals are also a part of the instrument-encrusted panels which surround the pilot in flight.

The success or failure of a flight, even life or death, is a matter of reading and interpreting a veritable galaxy of gauges and controlling the conditions they reflect by the mechanical manipulation of a forest of controls. Forty-nine instruments cover almost every square inch of the five foot wide panel in our C-54. There are seventy-four switches on the electrical and generator control panel. Twenty eight mechanical controls project from the large pedestal between the two pilots' seats, and scattered throughout the cockpit are a variety of miscellaneous controls used for comparatively less important functions like defrosting the windshield, releasing emergency flares, transferring fuel from one tank to another and providing air pressure to the wing de-icer boots. The navigator's table behind the pilot's seat is sandwiched in between banks of radio receivers, transmitters and five-foot-high panels of circuit breakers and fuses.

The purpose of our Florida training was not to teach us the problems involved in the operation of large, multi-engine aircraft, but, rather, to familiarize us with a particular aircraft, the procedures to be followed in various emergency situations and to bring us to a degree of current proficiency where we would be able to wring the maximum possible performance from the aircraft in any situation. This was accomplished at the cost of several thousand foot-pounds of physical energy and barrels of sweat. Holding thirty tons of aircraft in the air with two engines out on the same side requires as much muscle as it does know-how. We spent hours at night practicing approaches and landings at a small, abandoned World War II training field in the

heart of the Everglades. The field was not only abandoned, it was without lights except for one dim flare-pot to mark the centerline of the approach end of the runway.

Just as an aircraft will not fly until it reaches a particular speed, by the same token it will not land until that flying speed is dissipated. A minimum distance of several thousand feet is required for ground-roll after landing. If the runway is short, as our practice field was, the airspeed and rate of descent on approach to the field must be carefully computed and precisely controlled in order to insure that the aircraft stops flying and touches down on the end of the runway and not half way down its length. This, too, requires a measure of concentration and physical control not required at places where runways extend for two miles across large municipal and military air fields.

Sooner or later the regular pattern of flights into and out of the abandoned field was bound to attract attention. One night we had come to a complete stop after landing and were in process of turning the aircraft around for take off in the opposite direction. Two headlights appeared at the far end of the runway racing toward us. The headlights were joined by a revolving red light on the top of the car. Mac flipped on the landing lights and opened the throttles wide. I had a brief glimpse of a green patrol car with a large badge painted on the front door panel careening off the runway in a cloud of dust as we passed a few feet over head. We returned to Fort Lauderdale and flew no more that night. Two nights later we were back at the practice field and we continued to use it without further interruption from local authorities. It is interesting to speculate on exactly what channels were used to pass the word to the sheriff of the county where our practice strip was located. Whatever the channels were they were effective, although I feel sure the sheriff's curiosity was never satisfied.

For ten days before we departed Fort Lauderdale we practiced not only lights-out approaches to the practice strip, we also flew all over the state of Florida at an altitude

of 200 feet. Even in daylight, at better than 200 miles per hour, 200 feet is close to the ground. On a dark night it is extremely close. Although 200 feet will clear all terrain obstacles in the State, it won't clear them by much, and Florida is studded with radio antennas that rise much higher than 200 feet into the sky. The concentration required to maintain exact altitude, plus the eye-strain associated with watching for the blinking red lights that marked the soaring radio antennas, left us wringing wet at the end of these flights.

In addition to the time spent in flight, we also put in many hours around the dinette table in our apartment studying the C-54 Flight Manual which contains detailed descriptions and diagrams of the aircraft's fuel, oil, hydraulic and electrical systems, cruise control charts, power charts, loading diagrams, and emergency operating procedures. A good working knowledge of all of these contributes substantially to the confidence and peace of mind of a pilot and crew when the night is dark, when the weather is lousy and when the landing is many miles and several hours ahead. Red Cornish was smarter than any of us. He had an excellent knowledge, both theoretic and practical, of aircraft systems and could quickly study and understand the multi-colored schematic diagrams of the C-54 systems. He could preconceive possible malfunctions, describe their visual indications in the cockpit, and prescribe the proper crew actions. Red also had other talents not associated with the operation and maintenance of the C-54. During our brief stay at the hotel in Miami, Red had sought out an acquaintance who was the owner of a 60-foot yacht and a handsome home on Miami Beach. Red quickly organized what constituted virtually a second career for himself as first mate on the yacht, and he became a member in good standing of Miami Beach social circles devoted to boating, boozing and (on his authority) broads. When we returned in the middle of the day from a six-hour session on the aircraft most of us dissolved in pools of sweat and lay around the apartment for two or three hours before reviving sufficiently to make our way out to

the small pool in back of the apartment, or wander down to the beach. Not Red. Red hit the shower and within thirty minutes was on his way to Miami, absolutely immaculate in grey trousers, blue shirt, white tie and two-tone shoes. A light-weight blue blazer hung in the back seat of the car. Freshly shaven and without a hair out of place. Red positively glistened in the bright Florida sunshine as he emerged from the apartment across the street and headed for his yacht at Miami Beach—followed by the envious eyes of all. Red never missed a flight and, unlike Phil, never showed the slightest strain from his extracurricular social activities.

Phil discovered a Turkish night club the first night in Fort Lauderdale. He also discovered a doe-eyed and pneumatic young belly dancer from Brooklyn who was part of the floor show. Unhappily for Phil a quickly-flourishing friendship could only be cultivated between 2 o'clock in the morning when Salome got off work and 6 o'clock in the morning when Phil had to report to the flight line. There were mornings when Phil wasn't scheduled to fly, of course, and on these days the cultivating continued right through until 4 o'clock in the afternoon when the night club doors were opened. On the days when Phil had to fly he came directly from his garden of Allah to the airport where we hoisted him up the ladder into the aircraft and onto one of the two bunks in the companionway just aft of the cockpit. We had to schedule Phil to fly the last of the two-hour periods so that he could nap for four hours before addressing himself to the exigencies in the cockpit. This was as much out of consideration for our own hides as it was out of sympathy for Phil and his chronic state of exhaustion. As far as I know the only time Phil slept while we were in Fort Lauderdale was in the aircraft—except for one three-day period when Salome was confined to the hospital with an attack of appendicitis. (The demands of her profession precluded an operation). Leo made book on the chances for Phil's survival and suggested that we form a pool to see who could come closest to guessing the day on which Phil

would expire. Phil made it but I don't believe by a wide margin.

Erick showed up at the apartment only occasionally. Once we passed the word through Mac that some of us were running out of money again. Erick came by with the usual attache case full of hundred dollar bills. On another occasion he dropped in to make sure we had all provided ourselves with the de-labeled clothing and equipment required at our ultimate destination. None of us ever saw Mac or Les or Erick socially. We didn't even know where they lived. We had a telephone number where we could reach Erick if a need arose. There was no need for socializing, of course, and we were well aware that Erick and the others were more-or-less permanently attached to the Company and that their degree of involvement in the operation was much higher than our own. If they wanted to keep everything on a rigid, nothing-but-business basis, that was their prerogative. However, there was also a noticeable lack of just ordinary friendliness in our relationship which seemed odd and unnecessary. I think I may have circled the edges of the solution to this minor mystery one night when I ran into Erick at a bar. He was alone. There were only a handful of people in the bar, and it would have been stupid not to sit down beside him. Erick was pretty well up into the

sauce—which surprised me. He talked too much, which also surprised me. Somewhere in the course of the ensuing conversation he conceded that at least we, meaning our group from Birmingham, “wash genumum” and not “a bunch of professional thugsh” like a lot of the people he had to deal with. The bar was beginning to fill, Erick had a considerable head start on me, and it seemed wise not to hang around and attempt to pursue the matter. The startling thought occurred to me, however, that maybe Erick and Mac didn't know much more about us than we did about them; that perhaps the thoroughly developed policy in the Company of no one knowing anything he didn't absolutely have to know was a two way street, and that Mac and Erick knew nothing of our backgrounds, the details of our employment, or what our ultimate mission was to be. Whatever the answer, it seemed likely that Erick had business with people from time to time whom he did not particularly admire and with whom he had no desire to associate in any other way. Perhaps, then, he had simply assumed in the beginning that we belonged to a category of hired help already familiar to him. In any case, while this encounter with Erick provided an interesting side-light, what he thought was not important because we were about to bid Erick a permanent adieu.



CENTRAL AMERICA

Late one afternoon Erick arrived at the apartment while we were going through the ritual which Ernie insisted was mandatory in order to broil steak properly on an outdoor grill. Any of us were permitted to broil steak in the oven, but when we moved outdoors to the charcoal broiler by the swimming pool, Ernie became a sort of high priest who was apparently the only living person entrusted with the details of the magic rites he performed. Whatever his secrets were, you got the impression that somewhere they had been inscribed on tablets of stone. The broiler was Ernie's altar. No one was permitted to approach until commanded to do so. When this call came, it was with some difficulty that we restrained ourselves from going forward on hands and knees to accept his largesse.

Erick brought the news that we were to leave next day for "down south." He instructed us to pack and leave Fort Lauderdale next morning in time to be in Miami and checked into a hotel there by 6 o'clock in the evening. Erick stayed to share one of Ernie's steaks, with which he seemed suitably impressed. He said what a pity it was that Ernie was not equally as well qualified on the C-54 as he was on the broiler. This was a lugubrious attempt at light humor and as close as Eric

could come to unbending from his rigidly formal attitude.

We left Fort Lauderdale at noon. Mr. and Mrs. Harding seemed genuinely sorry to see us go. I think they had hoped we might stay until after the annual Easter assault on that city by vacationing college students. They were a nice old couple. Normally nice old couples who retire to the management of small apartment-hotels tend to become somewhat overburdened with curiosity—particularly about their guests. I had to admire the Hardings in this respect. Not once in all the time we were there did they ask difficult questions or express undue interest in the activities of the six men who occupied apartment 21-A, who flew airplanes with another five men who lived across the street, and who came and went at all hours of the day and night. When we first checked in to the apartment we had said we were engaged in flight checking electronics for a manufacturer of aircraft equipment. We hadn't thought highly of this story ourselves, but perhaps it was better than we gave it credit for. At the time no one could fly an airplane into or out of Florida without filing a flight plan. Border Patrol and Customs people were stationed at every airfield in Florida to

prevent flights or any related activity in behalf of, or against the Castro regime in Cuba. In spite of this, we had operated a large, four-engine aircraft in and out of the Fort Lauderdale airport without once being questioned. I have always been curious about how "the word" is passed from one government agency to another when the one is engaged in activities which the other is responsible for preventing. It must require some rather fancy footwork and extreme, if self-induced, myopia.

I drove to Miami next day with Erick and checked in to the Gateway Motel. The other men followed later. Phil turned in the rental car, and by 6 o'clock we were all packed into the small motel room burning furniture with cigarette butts and squabbling over one bottle of Scotch, four glasses and ten well developed thirsts.

Erick came in and said we should eat if we were hungry because we couldn't leave until after dark, and we wouldn't have another opportunity until sometime the next morning. We had rustled up more glasses and another bottle of Scotch, so no one was hungry except Gordon, of course, who left and came back in a few minutes with a three-layer hamburger.

Erick returned at 7:30. He told us to leave the room two at a time at two minute intervals, walk up to 34th Street, turn right and get into a truck that was parked half-way down the block. The truck was a Hertz van with a closed body. Two wooden benches were attached to each side of the panel walls. Erick said not to talk and not to make any noise. He closed the doors and we drove through the city for approximately thirty minutes. At first the sounds of heavy traffic on the streets and the constant stopping and starting at traffic lights identified our route as being through sections of the business area of Miami. Then came long stretches of uninterrupted, traffic free progress. We tried to plot our course by keeping track of turns and timing the intervals between stops. By the time we slowed for a final turn into what was obviously a driveway, no one had the slightest

idea what part of town we were in. We all gave Ferd the Navigator hell.

Erick opened the doors and we climbed down into the fresh air. The truck was parked on a circular driveway in front of a vintage mansion with squatty columns supporting the roof of a porch that ran across the front of the house. The porch was brightly lighted. The light spilled out onto the driveway and faded out through the trees down in the direction of the road. The house was set well back on the large lot and was out of sight from the road. Erick said to "just hang around outside" for a few minutes, and he and the driver of the truck disappeared through the front door. We waited for an hour and a half. There were no signs of life in the house. A light burned in the front hall but no lights showed through any of the windows, which seemed to be heavily curtained. Finally Erick reappeared and said, "all right, gentlemen, let's go." We got back into the truck for another forty minute's drive. No one explained the purpose of the diversion to the old house.

We drove back through town, again identifiable by traffic sounds. Leo had begun to curse "those stupid, GI bastards" when the truck slowed, made a sharp turn, and came to a complete stop. We heard sounds of voices outside and after a minute the truck ground into low gear and we drove for a short distance before coming to another halt. Then we heard the familiar sound of hangar doors opening. The truck moved ahead and stopped. The hangar doors closed behind us. Eric opened the doors of the truck and we stepped down onto the floor of a large, empty hangar. We were parked close to a small door that led into what had been a parts and supply shop. Shelves and bins still lined the walls. Some of them held suitcases and other gear. Black-out curtains covered the windows. There were a couple of couches against one wall and a coffee table was covered with old magazines and dog-eared paper backs. A few straight back chairs were scattered around the room. Over in one corner a stocky, bald man in T-shirt and shorts sat behind an old wooden desk. The man's name, if I remember, was "Nick".

"Well, gentlemen," Erick said, "I'll leave you here. Nick will tell you what to do." That was the last we saw of Erick except for a brief encounter several weeks later on the ramp at Homestead Air Force Base when I came in one night with a load of "mutineers" from Nicaragua.

"I'm glad we're rid of that pontifical GI bastard," Leo said. Leo was a chronic malcontent, but at times he *did* manage to get things in proper perspective.

Nick was business-like and uncommunicative. He told us to tag our suitcases and "stow our gear" in one of the bins along the wall. We were instructed to take everything out of our billfolds except money and our phoney papers, and stow them, too. Then Nick checked over the things in our duffle bags to make sure that everything we would take with us had the labels removed.

"Just make yourselves at home," he said when he had finished. We didn't know it at the time, of course, but later we learned that Nick was a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy.

We waited for an hour. Sandy went to sleep and began to snore. He started softly, then built up to a crescendo of sound of unbelievable proportions—at which point he woke himself up. During one of these lulls Leo pulled his chair up close to Sandy.

"Do you know what I'm going to do with you when we get down in the jungle?" Leo asked.

"What are you talking about, Leo? Gowan, let me sleep."

"I'm going to take you out in the woods one night, you hairy bastard and tie you up in the top of a tree. Then I'm going to sit back and wait and see what comes up after you."

"I know what it'll be," Gordon said "a big, fat lady Gorilla."

Nick came in from outside. "All right, fellas, you can board your aircraft now. It's on the ramp at the far side of the hangar. Don't show any lights on the ramp."

We waited for another hour in the airplane. Two men came in and went forward to the cockpit. We heard them talking in a foreign language—not Spanish. This was our first contact with the so-called "contract" crews. They were a group of pilots who, as we later understood it, had come over from somewhere in the Orient. They were in an entirely different category from our group. Their flying activities were apparently confined entirely to flights between Miami and Central America and to the transport of Cuban exiles and supplies to the training bases. There were five or six of these "contract" pilots. I believe at least one or two were Polish.

We heard small scuffling sounds outside on the ramp. Another man came on board wearing a pistol on his belt. He came forward in the cabin and spoke to us briefly.

"We are taking some Cubans down with us," he said. "I have instructed them that they are not to move around and not to try to come forward into the cockpit area. I suggest that you men get yourselves as comfortably situated as possible and stay put throughout the flight. If there is any trouble, I'll be up forward and will come back and take care of it."

He walked back and stood by the big loading door at the aft end of the cabin. Forty Cubans came up the ladder and filed into the cabin. They were uniformed in stiff, new fatigues (right off the supply sergeant's shelf no doubt) and creaky new jump boots with still-shiny soles. They appeared to be of all ages from twenty to forty-five. Most of the older men looked soft and flabby. They had all obviously come directly from some recruiting and supply center in the Miami area.

The eleven men in our group had taken seats in the cabin well forward. The only seats were long, canvass, bench-type seats that ran the length of each side of the cabin. There was not enough room for everyone in the seats. Some of the new arrivals stretched out on the heavy cargo deck. They all looked at us with various combinations of curiosity and apprehension. They hadn't expected us any-

more than we had expected them. It suddenly occurred to me that the man up forward with the pistol probably had a valid reason for being on board, and that his reference to "trouble" was possibly more meaningful than we had at first grasped. With thousands of Cubans seeking sanctuary in Miami each month, it would be unrealistic to believe that Castro agents and informers were not among them, and that they might not be among us at the moment. For such a person to commandeer a C-54 load of anti-Castro rebels along with a mixed bag of CIA-hired pilots would be a neat trick to pull off and would make a lot of points back home in Havana. I began to look the Cuban passengers over very carefully, but I couldn't find a face that looked as if it might belong to a Castro infiltrator—or, I might say, they *all* looked that way. My inspection was interrupted by the sound of an inverter beginning to hum, followed by the cranking of the number 3 engine. In a minute all four engines were running and the aircraft began to move. I could tell by the amount of power the pilot used to get underway that we were heavily loaded with fuel. I sweated out the take-off. We must have used at least five thousand feet of runway before we became airborne. I made mental note of all power adjustments and when we were well established in our climb I settled back and returned to my inspection of the Cubans.

After an hour or so in flight it began to get cold in the cabin. I crawled under the long seat, pulled a light jacket over my shoulders, and went to sleep on the deck, fenced in by a row of boots and with the posterior of the man in the seat above me about three inches from my face.

I slept for several hours. When I woke up it was apparent that the sun was high in the sky—even with its light filtered through the aircraft's painted windows. I worked my way painfully out from under the seat, trying not to step in anyone's face. Men were sprawled out in a tangle of arms and legs all over the deck. A cigarette sliced the gloom at the far end of the cabin where two of the Cubans were talking and waving their arms around.

Somewhere back in the same direction Sandy's dulcet tones were clearly audible above the sound of the four engines. Gordon was on the floor, sitting with his back against the door into the cockpit. His knees were doubled up under his chin and both arms were wrapped around his shins. Gordon's eyes were wide open, unblinking and apparently fixed on nothing. I leaned over and asked him if he were alive.

"No," he said.

Phil had fallen over sideways in the bucket seat. He looked bad. His face was puffy and showed the strain of chasing the belly dancer around all over Fort Lauderdale for three weeks. I leaned across Phil and put my eye to a scratch in the paint on one of the windows. Below was an unbroken expanse of jungle. By working my eye around to a different angle I was able to pick out a towering mountain peak just ahead and off to the right of our course. I signaled this intelligence to Gordon by making a pointing motion downward with my finger. At that moment the pilot reduced power. The break in engine rhythm roused the sleeping men and they began to untangle themselves and sit up. The cabin became a bedlam of Spanish.

There were more power reductions. As we lost altitude the air became heavy and hot. By sound alone I was able to follow through on the approach—flaps down, gear down, more flaps and then the turn in on final. After we touched down and slowed sufficiently, we turned off the runway. Almost immediately we turned back parallel to the runway heading, taxied what seemed to be only a few feet and stopped. The pilot shut down the engines. I was puzzled. We couldn't be more than a few feet off the runway. We were not. The clearance between runway and parking ramp at Retalhuleu was almost non-existent. Aircraft taking off or landing at Retalhuleu had only a few feet of clearance from the wing tips of aircraft parked on the ramp. This didn't intrude itself into our thoughts too much, however, because the runway was so narrow that there were only four feet to spare on each side

of the main gear. The Retalhuleu air base was not exactly Kennedy International.

The man with the pistol came out of the cockpit, walked to the rear of the cabin, unlocked the door and pushed it open. The Cubans all filed down the ladder first. We could hear shouts and yells of greeting as they were recognized by friends who had preceded them to Retalhuleu.

I was the first of our group down the ladder. The sun beat down with such intensity that it seemed to have acquired some material substance. It made you want to duck.

Before I could get my eyes adjusted to the heat and glare a hand was on my arm and a voice was saying, "I need a pilot this afternoon, Buck. Are you ready—after you eat?"

It was Hal McGee.

"You're kidding. Of course. You're kidding—aren't you?"

Hal laughed. He has a well defined sadistic streak that runs through him from top to bottom.

"Not if you feel up to it," Hal said. (He didn't wait for me to say). "Get one of the other pilots and you-all take a load over for us this afternoon. We haven't had any C-54 pilots and we need to get going in a hurry. The aircraft's all loaded. Go eat—and I guess you better find some bedding and a bunk. You won't be back until late tonight. I'll get you a chart and give you the rest of the poop in about an hour. Maybe I'll get Bill Peterson to go with you and show you the way. Have a good trip down?"

"It was just absolutely wonderful," I said.

The rest of the crew had left the aircraft and were standing around listening to the conversation. Their relief that they had not been first down the ladder was evident. I asked Gordon and Leo to go with me. They didn't seem to mind—too much. Gordon staggered away groaning, and Leo spat viciously toward the wheel of the parked aircraft. So far no one had thought to ask where we were going. We were going to "Tide", which was the base at Puerto Cabeza, Nicaragua. Up to this

point everyone had heard a lot about Guatemala, but no one had known of a base in Nicaragua. To insure the security of this base, we were required to check out charts at the beginning of each flight, and to check them back in again with the security officer at the end of each flight—and under no circumstances was a Cuban allowed to get his hands on a chart that would show courses leading to Puerto Cabeza.

I think many Cubans who participated in the invasion may resent things like this as suggesting a lack of trust and confidence in them, and which may have appeared to denigrate their patriotism and dedication. All things considered, however, such policies are easy enough to understand. The imminence of an attempt by organized exile forces to overthrow the Castro government was widely accepted. The role of the United States government as a principal backer of this effort was widely recognized. The presence of training bases in Guatemala and the airfield at Retalhuleu had been pretty well pinned down and identified for what they were. Communications between Cubans in Guatemala and Cubans in Miami was not difficult. Communications between Cubans in Miami and Cubans in Havana was easily accomplished. And whereas it might be one thing for Castro to be completely convinced that Cubans were training in the mountains of Guatemala for an invasion of Cuba, it would be a far more serious matter for him to learn of the staging base from which this invasion was to be launched. (It could not have been launched from Guatemala because of the distance involved). It was essential, of course, to recognize the possibility that Castro agents and informers had infiltrated the base at Guatemala. Therefore, even on the night when the invasion forces began to come down out of the hills to board the aircraft that would transport them to their ships at the base in Puerto Cabeza, they still didn't know where they were going, or even where they were when they got there. I believe that this was a necessary and an entirely correct policy.

Hal led us toward the two story frame building that sat just off the parking ramp. It

looked as if it might originally have been intended as an airport terminal building. There was a small structure on top of the building that looked like a control tower.

Inside, just to the right of the entrance from the ramp, two steps led down into a dining area. Along one side of this room cafeteria facilities were set up. Behind the counters a door led into the kitchen. There were eight tables set up in the middle of the dining room. They were picnic-type tables with backless wooden benches on each side. In the center of each table was a cluster of salt and pepper shakers, a sugar bowl, meat sauces, a bottle of catsup, a jar of mustard and a thousand flies. The natural heat of the day, along with the heat from the kitchen and an all pervading effluvia of stew simmering in a black cast iron pot, combined to produce one of the most effective appetite deterrents I have ever encountered.

Only one man was in the mess hall. He was Bill Peterson. There was a plate of something in front of him which I failed to recognize even when I sat down at the table directly across from him. It appeared to consist of long, stringy pieces of meat immersed with pieces of what I took to be vegetables in a slimy reddish gravy.

Bill didn't exactly look up when I sat down. He just raised his lowered eye lids and looked out from under them at me.

"Ugh," he said.

"Bill," I said, "Is that a word of greeting for an old pal, or is there something you're trying to tell me. What is that you've got there on that plate?"

"Dead goat."

"It doesn't exactly make my mouth water, Bill. How is goat prepared in this restaurant?"

"They kill him."

"Hal says you're going to ride with us this afternoon and show us the way to Tide."

"Aren't you going to eat some goat first?"

"Isn't there anything else—something I could kind of train on?"

"Yes, chicken."

"That sounds pretty good. I think I'll try the chicken."

"Have you seen any of the chickens down here? They're made entirely out of feathers and bones. You'd better have goat."

I decided I would not eat at all until death from starvation began to close in.

I had little opportunity to learn much about the base or the people who occupied it before leaving for my first flight to Puerto Cabeza.

The main building served as base headquarters. In addition to the kitchen and mess hall, it provided administrative personnel with offices and living quarters. It was by no means a large building and it had not been designed with anything in mind even approaching the utilization it ultimately achieved. To make up for these original deficiencies, interior space had been utilized in any way possible to accommodate increasing demands. Over the mess hall and kitchen a mezzanine had been inserted between the ground floor and ceiling. Throughout the building partitions had been erected whenever the need arose to make two, or three, or four, rooms out of one. Since the number of cubic feet of space available was limited by the dimensions of the building, space to partition became progressively harder to come by. One cubicle had been built on a landing between the first and second floors. It was just large enough to hold one small folding cot which seemed to be occupied day and night—I assume not always by the same individual. The measure of privacy provided the occupant of this cell must have been mitigated somewhat by the fact that the stairs were in constant use twenty-four hours a day. By the time I arrived at Retalhuleu the headquarters building closely resembled the inside of a hive put together by bees working completely at random, combined with some of the features of the crazy house at an amusement park.

A square frame structure was perched in the center of the roof of the main building. It had been intended to serve as a control tower,

but was being used for living quarters and was occupied by the B-26 pilots in our group who had preceded us. Predictably, it was referred to as the penthouse.

The penthouse was constructed of unfinished lumber. Two-by-fours supported a planked roof that had been covered with tar paper. The tar paper absorbed the heat of the sun and transferred it with undiminished intensity to the area below. The penthouse walls were pine boards nailed to the support columns for a distance half way to the roof. The remaining interval was screened. Occupants of the penthouse basted in their own sweat during the heat of the day and were deluged at night by tropical thunderstorms that swept through the screen on 50-knot gusts. Access to the penthouse was through a door on the second floor and up a ramp to the roof.

I staked out a lower bunk in one of five double-deck bunks spaced around three sides of the penthouse. Pete Ray, Bill Peterson, Don Gordon and Joe Harbert were already in residence. Al Walters and Ron Smith had moved to Puerto Cabeza where they were permanently stationed. Riley Shamburger was also at Puerto Cabeza. Hal McGee lived somewhere else in our headquarters building. Ernie King, Phil Chapman, Gordon Neilson, Leo Baker and Sandy Sanders filled up the remaining bunks in the penthouse. Red Cornish, Jack Verson, Wade Gray and Fred Ealey established themselves in one of the barracks behind the administration building.

From the penthouse I had a good view of the entire base. The one runway ran northwest and southeast. It was just barely wide enough to accommodate the C-54's and at 4,800 feet was not really long enough. At gross weight on take off in a C-54 there was no "go, no-go" decision to worry about. If an engine failed on take-off the runway was not long enough to continue on the remaining three good engines, nor was it long enough to abort the take-off and get the aircraft stopped before plunging through the fence and down the hill at the far end of the field. As we used to say, the go, no-go decision was

made before we left the penthouse. The southeast end of the runway was 150 feet higher than the northwest end—enough of a grade to make it desirable to take off down hill and land uphill unless there was a wind of considerable force.

A taxi strip paralleled the runway for half its length at the southeast end. This taxi strip was used as a parking ramp where aircraft were lined up nose to tail. Sometimes there were as many as ten aircraft parked in line. There was no room to turn an aircraft around or to move in any direction except straight forward, and then only when the aircraft in front had been moved. From time to time there were rumors and warnings of possible attacks on the base by certain dissident elements operating in the mountains east of the field. If any of these attacks had materialized a couple of slashed tires on the lead aircraft in line would have effectively immobilized all the other aircraft on the field.

The administration building was located near the southeast end of the runway and close enough to the parallel taxi strip so that a good broad jumper could have made it from the roof of the building to the tip of a wing. Two typical army-type barracks were located behind the administration building. Each of these barracks was furnished with two rows of double-deck bunks and occupied by 20 to 30 men. In line with the barracks and extending northwest were a series of other buildings of various sizes and shapes. These buildings were used to store supplies for the base and for light maintenance and repair work. Maintenance and repair work on the aircraft was performed outside on the ramp. At the far end of the line of buildings a small, one-room structure served as a "club". Club facilities were limited. There was one large table, a few chairs, a bar hammered together from scrap lumber, a dart game on one wall, and no ice. The club was open 24-hours a day and in use by from one to thirty men at any given moment.

In the area between the line of buildings and the taxi strip there was an accumulation of spare tires, other aircraft parts, and large

stacks of crates and ammunition boxes covered by tarpaulins.

Beyond the end of the runway at the south-east end of the field there was another group of barracks. They were separated from our complex by a distance of a quarter-mile. These barracks were occupied by Guatemalan troops stationed on the field, I was told, to protect the base from possible attack by communist guerilla forces stooging around in the hills to the east. How effective these troops would have been in event of any such attack is questionable. I watched a company at target practice in the field back of our barracks one morning. They were firing at targets set up at a distance of not more than one hundred yards. As far as I could determine, from the puffs of dirt kicked up in the general vicinity, not one of them ever even hit a target. It didn't look as if they could have come close enough to anything as small as a man to even frighten him. I was too horrified to watch for more than a few minutes, and it could be, of course, that some of the troops may have finally found the range.

The area on which the base at Retalhuleu was located, a strip of land approximately one-and-one-half-miles long by a half-mile wide, was entirely enclosed. A six-foot high wall of corrugated metal siding blocked the field from the view of anyone traveling on a highway which ran parallel to the field on the west side—that is it did as long as he kept traveling. Anyone who stopped to look through a crack between pieces of siding could get a full view of the base. On the east side a wire fence bordered the field and closed in both ends. The railroad from Tapachula to Guatemala City and San Jose runs along the edge of the field just outside the fence. Two trains a day went by pulling ten or twelve cars with people hanging out all the windows and standing between the cars. We often stood on the roof outside the penthouse to wave to the people on the trains. They always waved back.

I took off on my first flight to Puerto Cabeza about two hours after arriving from

Miami. Hal handed me the necessary navigation charts with the courses to be followed marked in red pencil. It was not a simple matter of taking off from Retalhuleu and heading direct to Puerto Cabeza. Such a course would have carried us over El Salvador and Honduras. We were not permitted to enter the air space over those two countries. Instead, we turned southwest after take-off from Retalhuleu, crossed the port city of San Jose and continued out to sea for a distance of twenty-five miles. Then we took up a south-east heading and flew parallel to the coastline until we were opposite the Gulf of Fonseca which washes the shores of three countries—El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua. Here we turned and flew east-northeast across Nicaragua to Puerto Cabeza on the Caribbean Sea. On this final leg we had to fly at an altitude of eleven thousand feet across the mountains before dropping down over the jungles and the coastal plains of Nicaragua. The return trip followed the same courses. It was a three and a half to four hour flight each way.

Gordon, Leo and I discovered all the horrors of the operation immediately. To begin with we were struck almost speechless when we climbed the ladder into the aircraft. The entire cargo area was piled high with heavy boxes of ammunition. To reach the cockpit we had to crawl on hands and knees through the narrow space between the boxes of ammunition and the roof of the aircraft. There was a manifest of sorts on the pilot's seat which alleged that the weight of the aircraft and its cargo totaled 73,000 pounds. This is the maximum gross weight allowable for a C-54. I judged that this was the sole basis for the computation on the weight and balance sheet. Interestingly enough, in the weeks ahead our aircraft *always* weighed exactly 73,000 pounds according to the manifests prepared for us.

Hal had instructed us to refuel at Puerto Cabeza and had told us what quantity of fuel to put on board. The practice, we learned, was to carry only enough fuel for the round-trip between Retalhuleu and Puerto Cabeza.

This resulted in our always leaving Retalhuleu with just enough gas to make it to Puerto Cabeza—providing, of course, that we hit Puerto Cabeza right on the nose. It was necessary to sacrifice fuel for payload, which was all right except on dark nights when the weather was bad over the mountains, Puerto Cabeza was blanketed by low clouds, and someone had forgotten to turn on the radio homing beacon at the field at Puerto Cabeza. All, or some combination of these factors invariably existed.

The cockpit of the C-54 was like the inside of a pressure cooker. In a matter of seconds we were all soaked with sweat. It poured off my forehead into my eyes blinding me. I had to tie a handkerchief around my head in order to see. Sweat poured down my arms and off the ends of my fingers. My hands were so wet and slippery I couldn't get a tight grip on the control column—a necessity because like a Mack truck, a C-54 requires a firm hold and a good bit of muscle.

"Let's get this thing in the air," Gordon said. "I think I'm going to faint."

Leo got the four engines running and we went through the first check list. When I advanced the throttles to begin taxiing, I knew something was wrong.

"Having a little trouble getting moving, Captain?" Bill Peterson was leering over my shoulder.

"Very funny," I said. "This machine was either loaded by saboteurs or its stuck in the asphalt."

Normally 800 rpm's is a good power setting to taxi a C-54. At 800 rpm this aircraft didn't budge. I advanced the throttles. Still no sign of life. I pushed the throttles up over half way. The aircraft began to inch forward—to the accompaniment of shrill metallic screams of protest coming from somewhere down in the neighborhood of the landing gear. We waddled out to the end of the runway, the aircraft squealing every foot of the way. I expected the gear to fold up any second. We went through the take off check list.

I looked ahead down the length of the runway and considered turning in my resignation. The runway seemed to have shrunk. I turned to Leo who was sitting on the flight engineer's jump seat just behind the two pilots' seats.

"Look, Leo, keep your eyes on those engine gauges." I said. "If anything goes wrong, don't wait for me or Gordon to call the engine. *You feather it.* But *don't* feather as long as we're pulling any power at all, okay?"

"Okay, cap'n, but it really doesn't make any difference. This son-of-a-bitch is never going to get off the ground."

"Let's try and think positively, Leo."

"Let's taxi this thing back to the ramp and think positively about going back to Birmingham," Gordon said.

I advanced the throttles to 30 inches of manifold pressure and Gordon followed on through to 56 inches with the throttles on his side. The aircraft accelerated unbelievably slowly. In fact, "accelerate" is not a proper word to use to describe our performance for the first 1,000 feet of runway we traveled. I moved my hand from the nose steering wheel to the control column at 70 miles per hour and didn't look at the airspeed indicator again. There was no point in looking. Three-fourths of the runway was already behind us. There was no stopping now, and when we reached the end of the runway I would rotate and we would either fly or chug right on through the cotton gin at the foot of the hill off the end of the runway. Actually, I think we went straight off the end of the runway without altering our trajectory and became airborne when the ground dropped away into the shallow valley at the far end of the field. Leo raised the gear without waiting for me to call for it and we gained flying speed in time to avoid the cotton gin. Leo milked the flaps up and things seemed to go a little better. We probably had all of 500 feet when we crossed the coast line on the way out to sea.

For a start, we leveled off at 5,000 feet. We flew parallel to the coast about thirty miles

out. Gordon had assumed his fixed, unblinking, straight-ahead stare. Leo had immersed himself in a paper back book with a naked girl on the cover and the words "Sex Kitten" in the title. Bill was fiddling around at the navigator's table back of the pilot's seat.

I played with the automatic pilot for a while and managed to get us locked in on what seemed to be a reasonably accurate heading. Then I fiddled with the radar. There was no weather, but I wanted to compare the radar representations with actual terrain features and with the map. (In the absence of most radio aids, radar was to become our principal navigational aid). When there was nothing left to do in the cockpit, I began to toy with my own home-made ideas of time and distance and relativity.

Here we all are, I said to myself, suspended a mile and a half above the Pacific Ocean in a C-54 that belongs to the United States Air Force. In the back end of the aircraft is an incredible load of ammunition, destined to be used in the near future in an attempt to depose the head of the Cuban government. As of this moment we all seem to be completely identified with what we are doing—just as if we had been involved for months, or years. And yet, at this time yesterday, just 24-hours ago, I was cruising through the streets of Miami in a convertible with the top down, and I had never even heard the name of the place where I will land this aircraft in another two hours.

I looked at Gordon and Leo. There you sit, Gordon, a guy who probably has the first nickle he ever earned safely stashed away; a guy whose fetish is "staying in shape" and whose first look at any new place is to see where he will be able to run five miles every day. What are you doing up here, Gordon, shouldn't you be back home in Birmingham at the "Y"?

What about you, Leo? What are *you* doing up here? Do you have hopes that you will run into something with a forty-four inch bust and round heels?

And you, Bill, back there at the navigator's table—or have you sacked out in one of the

bunks? This is a far cry from the things that turn you on back home. This old crate isn't exactly an F-100. You won't find any bars down here like that one in Houston where the mamas all check in for a while in the morning after they drop the kids at school.

Well, so who do we think we are? Soldiers of fortune? Is it the old Lawrence of Arabia bit? No, that doesn't fit. We're not right for the part. We're a bunch of old geezers.

Gordon catches me with a grin on my face and turns away in disgust. There's nothing funny about any of this. But then, of course, Gordon doesn't know I have just called him an old geezer.

The air is unbelievably clear. The sky is a penetrating blue, washed here and there with brush strokes of white. Off to the east mountains grow right out of the sea. From our altitude the sea is an unending expanse of blues and greens in random patterns that blend in the distance with the sky. I catch sight far below, of a tiny splinter edged with white. It is a ship plowing north, another cockleshell like the one we are perched on in the sky, designed and fabricated and riveted together to carry men away from the land where they belong into elements where they have no business to be.

"Old buddy," I say to the captain of the ship far below, "to me you're just a splinter on the face of the sea, and to you I'm a speck in the sky and a distant hum. And yet, if we both sprang a leak right now, we'd spend the rest of eternity together, bumping around on a reef at the bottom of the Pacific Ocean. There'll be nothing to prove we ever existed—maybe a couple of yellowing old photographs. I can hear an as yet unborne child saying to her mother, "Mommy, who is that a picture of?" And the mother will say, "Let me see, now, that's your great-great uncle. I think—I'm not sure, but I think his name was so-and-so." She'll have it wrong, of course.

Bill came forward to interrupt my profound contemplations. As we cruised at five thousand feet down the coast of El Salvador he filled me in on what had happened to the B-26 group after leaving Miami.

Most of the B-26 pilots' time in Retalhuleu had been spent instructing Cuban pilots in formation flying and gunnery. Many of the 2506 Brigade's aircrews had limited or no experience as military pilots. Some were very short on experience of any kind. The most glaring weakness was in aerial gunnery. As Bill put it, "When we got down here most of those guys couldn't hit the side of a barn. Some of them couldn't even hit the pasture the barn was standing in."

The Cubans had constructed a target of bamboo poles, pine boards and fifty-gallon steel drums which they set up in the middle of a small lake a few miles from the Retalhuleu air base. Every day for two weeks they attacked this target with the six 50-calibre machine guns installed in the noses of the B-26's (This is enough concentrated fire power to knock a steam engine sideways off its tracks). When Bill and the other pilots arrived, the target was still afloat. The Birmingham pilots sank it the first afternoon they went up. In the few weeks before we arrived from Fort Lauderdale they put in many productive hours in the air with the Cuban pilots.

Some of our B-26 contingent checked out on C-46's in Retalhuleu. The C-46 is a twin-engine transport similar, but larger than the DC-3. Our B-26 group learned for the first time of the staging base at Puerto Cabeza and assisted in the initial airlift of supplies and equipment from Retalhuleu to Nicaragua.

Confined to the base most of the time, they found that time dragged. However, there were a few exciting interludes to break the monotony of daily routine.

Joe Harbert and Al Walters were assigned a mission one day to a small, unpaved, private field in Guatemala. They were flying a C-46 and they had to drag the aircraft in over the tops of some tall palms growing at the approach end of the short field. A wing-tip clipped the top of one of these trees and the C-46 wrapped itself up in a ball half in and half out of the woods on the edge of the field. The aircraft was a total loss. Miraculously, neither Joe nor Al got a scratch.

One morning a truck-load of Cubans from the training camp in the mountains were taken for a swim on the beach at San Jose. Four of the men were attacked and killed by sharks.

By pure coincidence, Don Gordon was overhead in a B-26. His attention was attracted by the truck and the group of men on what was normally a deserted stretch of beach. Flying low over the water for a closer look, he found himself a horrified witness to the last desperate moments of the four swimmers. He watched helplessly as a pack of sharks churned the sea to blood and foam.

On another occasion a large delegation of press representatives from the United States and Latin American countries visited the base at Retalhuleu. The night before this delegation arrived, all the pilots flew all the aircraft to San Jose. They lay low next day while the press was conducted on a guided tour of an air base which was apparently manned exclusively by Guatemalan forces.

The greatest excitement occurred one afternoon when a lone B-25 appeared over the field. The aircraft circled the field at an altitude of three to four thousand feet. It gave no indication of an intention to land. Some of the pilots who had served in the Cuban Air Force quickly identified the plane as one of Castro's. Bill Peterson was the only pilot in the air at the time and he was in a B-26 many miles to the south. Bill was contacted by radio and instructed to head for Retalhuleu to attempt to shoot down the B-25. Two B-26's on the ground were cranked up, but as soon as they started to taxi toward the end of the runway the B-25 headed east and disappeared into the mountains.

When we made the turn at the Gulf of Fonseca, I pushed the props and throttles forward to climb power and we began a gradual climb to eleven thousand feet. Soon we were over land again, a forbidding terrain, pushed all out of shape and so completely blanketed by the jungle trees that solid ground was only visible where mountain peaks had burst through the restraining cover, and in isolated

clearings where the aboriginal inhabitants of the forest had carved out patches of elbow room.

You can't always appreciate the world as you see it from an aircraft, not even when you've spent thirty years hanging around some where in the sky. You can only leave the earth for a few hours at a time, and the places from which you depart and the places to which you return must be specially prepared for you. Everything in between is inherently hostile. What was spread out below us now, from horizon to horizon, was definitely hostile. Our muscles became tense and we all began to strain silently, as if we could help the aircraft on its way.

As we approached the east coast of Nicaragua the terrain became less formidable. We had left the mountain ranges and the heavily forested foothills far behind. Soon we were over the coastal plains. We continued a long descent and altered course to the east to insure hitting the coast well south of Puerto Cabeza. With a limited fuel supply, there was no room for navigational errors. Puerto Cabeza was the only field within our range where we could land. It was, therefore, necessary to be absolutely certain of our position with respect to this field when we hit the coast. To think you were south, for instance, when in fact you were north of the field when you reached the coast, would mean that instead of flying toward the field when you turned, you would be flying away from it.

I had already become acutely conscious of the lack of radio navigation facilities along our route of flight. It was obvious that at night there would be no way to make course corrections by reference to the geographical features of the earth below. Campfires of savages are not good check points, and along the coastline human habitation is centered in widely scattered villages which, without lights, are unidentifiable from the air at night.

I switched on the radar, set it for a 25-mile range, and tilted the antenna down so that it would paint the coastline as we flew north toward Puerto Cabeza. I checked the radar picture with actual terrain features and with

the charts. I wanted to become familiar with the way everything looked on the radar screen. Already I was certain there would be times when the only way I would be able to find Puerto Cabeza was by radar. When we were about ten miles south, I saw the field at Puerto Cabeza. There were two prominent lakes a few miles southwest of the runway, and a long pier extended out from shore less than half a mile south of the field. I observed with great enthusiasm that the two lakes and the pier were easily identifiable on the radar screen.

The runway at Puerto Cabeza was longer and wider than the runway at Retalhuleu. It was laid out east and west. Since the prevailing wind was from off-shore, landings and take-offs were made to the east. As I crossed the field and turned downwind I observed that the southside of the runway was lined for half its length with B-26's. There was a long, frame building on the north side of the runway—next to a paved parking ramp. There were two small frame buildings off to one side of the runway at the east end of the field, but I couldn't find anything to indicate that a large complement of men was located anywhere on the field. As I turned in on final at about six hundred feet, however, I caught sight of a small, square water tower poking out of a clump of trees just south of the approach end of the runway. A closer look revealed a sizeable tent camp well hidden in the same grove.

A jeep drove out on to the runway and directed us to the parking ramp by the long shed. The shed turned out to be only a roof over an enormous number of crates and ammunition boxes piled in high stacks.

Ron Smith and Al Walters were in the jeep. We all shook hands and they wanted to know how long we had been at "Mad" and how we liked it over there. We said that we had gotten in only about two hours before our departure and hadn't had time to draw any conclusions. We wanted to know what was going on over here at Tide and how they liked the tent life. Al said they didn't know what was going on and that they didn't think much of Tide. There was plenty of beer but no

whiskey—nothing but cheap rum which they bought in town. Al said the rum tasted like molasses that had been spiked. The food was a little better than at Mad, but Scorpions and Tarantulas made life miserable. It was dangerous to put a pair of boots on in the morning without shaking them out first. Scorpions and spiders had discovered they could stay warm and comfortable at night down inside a hunting boot. Plumbing facilities at Tide were limited. A six-hole privy provided one accommodation. A 14-foot section of water pipe with holes bored in it at intervals served as the camp shower bath. The pipe was installed across a section of wood flooring laid on the ground opposite the mess tent. Flow of water through this pipe was controlled from a central valve at the water tower. It was turned on for an hour twice a day—from eleven until twelve noon, and from six until seven in the evening. Water poured from the holes in the pipe in pencil-thin streams spaced about two feet apart. Each hole in the pipe represented a separate shower position. To take a bath, you found an unoccupied position and lathered up in the hope that you would have time to rinse off before the water was turned off. A big man, thoroughly lathered, hardly had a chance. Shower times coincided with the times for the noon and evening meals—so you had to make a choice. You could take a shower and watch the other men eat; or you could eat and watch the men who were showering across the street. If this was not the most appetizing set-up in the world, it was at least edifying.

Ron said that General Doster was expected in that afternoon with a flight of six additional B-26's. He had no sooner gotten the words out of his mouth than the flight came roaring in from the north. The formation broke left and landed. We drove in the jeep to where the lead aircraft parked and waited for Reid to shut down. Reid got in the jeep with us and we drove across the runway to the camp.

Twelve-man tents were pitched in rows that ran at right angles to a long company street. The company street started at the end of the runway and ran down through the trees to a point close to a small stream where the water

tower had been constructed. A pump and filter were used to transfer the water from the stream to the tower which supplied the camp with water for cooking, drinking and bathing. A field kitchen and mess tent blocked the end of the company street. Next to it, on the north side of the street, was the first aid tent where Doc Barr lived and performed his services. Next to Doc Barr's tent was another mess tent. Near the runway another street angled north into the woods where a series of frame buildings had been constructed to house radio and instrument repair shops, ordinance shops and supplies. As at Retalhuleu, aircraft maintenance and repairs were performed on the ramp.

The tents which served as living quarters were all set up on the south side of the company street. The tent I eventually moved into was near the end of the runway. It was so close, in fact, that it was often covered with dust by an aircraft cranking up on the ramp. The Cuban aircrews, who had moved from Retalhuleu a short time before, all lived at the other end of the camp. In the center of the camp one group of tents and three small frame buildings were separated from the others by a surrounding barrier of accordion-type barbed wire—the kind used in combat to protect trenches and gun placements. All the brass lived in this compound, and an armed guard was on 24-hour duty at the entrance. The largest of the three buildings in the compound served as an operations headquarters. The other two buildings housed administrative and communications equipment—including the "long line" to Washington.

No one, including Reid Doster, knew, or would say, how close we were to D-day, but the transition from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabeza was in steady progress. Already there were more people in camp at Puerto Cabeza than were left at Retalhuleu. Reid said he had made his last trip back to the States and would remain in Puerto Cabeza until the operation had been completed—whenever that might be. Cuban aircrews, the "foreign nationals" we had heard about in Birmingham, were in the camp and had apparently been briefed, or at least partially briefed. Their movements were

BAY OF PIGS

severely restricted. Our job, in the weeks to come, was to complete the airlift of equipment and personnel to the staging base at Puerto Cabeza. We would have very little opportunity to talk to any but ourselves; to learn anything about the "big picture", or, in fact, to do anything much but eat and sleep and fly. Soon we established living quarters at both camps. Often, when we were roused for a flight, it took a few minutes for us to decide where we were—not that it was important.

The flight back to Retalhuleu the first night took four hours. We took off from Puerto Cabeza at 10:30 and flew southwest across Nicaragua. The interior of Central America is unbelievably dark at night. Even in the most thinly populated areas of the United States lighted villages and towns sprinkle the landscape at night, and in the thickly populated areas around large cities the earth is literally ablaze with multi-colored, pulsating, flashing lights. But flying across Nicaragua late at night is like passing through some dark time tunnel in the sky. Encapsulated in the twentieth century, you hang suspended in stygian darkness two miles above a primeval landscape where an occasional pinprick of bright orange marks the place where stone-age man lies sleeping on his spear. You can almost believe that the jungle around him crawls with life long since passed from the face of the earth.

Gordon nods in the seat beside me. Bill and Leo are asleep in the two bunks in the companionway. The even, steady sound of the four engines is occasionally broken by a rhythmic beat when one of the props gets out of synchronization with the others. A slight pressure on the prop control eliminates the beat. Otherwise I sit quiet and unmoving in the cockpit with my eyes fixed on the curtain of blazing stars that hangs between me and the distant rim of the earth. I am acutely conscious of what lies below me in the darkness, and the eerie feeling grows that we, and our aircraft, have somehow become displaced from the centerline of space and time.

Over the Pacific coastline we turn and fly northwest for an hour, then begin a long descent. We identify the City of San Jose, turn

inland fly northeast toward Retalhuleu. A faint, flashing beacon in the distance identifies the field, but when we arrive overhead there are no runway lights. We have to circle the base for twenty minutes before someone gets the idea that we can't land until flare pots are put out on the runway. We see the headlights of a jeep moving slowly down the runway. A flare appears first on one side, then on the other. Two or three flares at the approach end of the runway are all we need, and I start our approach before the jeep has worked its way more than a quarter of the length of the runway. I turn on final and line the aircraft up carefully with the flares, hoping that the driver of the jeep will realize we intend to land and that he will get off the runway. Leo hits the light switches and the landing lights come on and sweep forward in two great, white arcs, boring straight ahead and dissipating in the darkness. We are still too high for the lights to pick up anything on the ground. We must continue our descent, knowing that when we have almost reached the ground, landing lights will find a runway between the two rows of flares. The lights of the jeep race forward up the runway and turn off toward the administration building. When we taxi in to the ramp the jeep is parked and the driver has disappeared. A Guatemalan soldier on sentry duty is stretched out on a wooden bench under a mango tree by the entrance to the building. He is awake but he ignores us as we file wearily up the walk from the ramp and into the building. It is three o'clock in the morning when we drop into our bunks in the darkened penthouse. It is almost 48-hours since we have been to bed. I promise myself that I will sleep till noon.

I am awake by 9 o'clock in the morning, soaked in sweat. The temperature in the penthouse is already in the high nineties. By noon it will be over one hundred degrees, where it will stay until almost dark.

In the weeks that followed our arrival at Retalhuleu we followed a grueling schedule of almost daily flights between Retalhuleu and Puerto Cabeza. We usually left Retalhuleu late in the afternoon and returned in the early hours next morning. We always

flew as a crew of two pilots and a flight engineer. The pilots swapped legs on each flight. We slept when we could, or when we felt like sleeping—sometimes at Retalhuleu, sometimes at Puerto Cabeza, and often in flight on one of the two bunks in the aircraft. Because our flight schedules seldom coincided with camp routine on either side, often our meals consisted of baloney and cheese sandwiches eaten in flight.

We used our infrequent days off to take care of things like laundry, letters to the folks back home (which arrived there with postmarks from a variety of widely scattered places in the United States), and joining in all-out efforts at the club bar to lower the liquor level in Guatemala by a foot or two.

In Birmingham and in Florida our contacts with representatives of the "Company", as we referred to our employers, were limited to one or two men at a time. In Birmingham we had met briefly with Al, Frank, Jake and Hoyt. We never saw Jake or Hoyt afterwards. Al and Frank were in Retalhuleu and Puerto Cabeza. They were both in positions of highest authority, although we never did quite figure out who was superior to whom. In Fort Lauderdale Eric was our principal contact with the Company and Mac was our instructor in transition flying on the C-54. I saw Eric again only once after leaving Fort Lauderdale. That was on the ramp at Homestead Air Force Base in Florida the night Gordon and I flew the "mutineers" up from Puerto Cabeza. We often saw Mac in Retalhuleu and Puerto Cabeza. He seemed to fly back and forth between Florida and the bases in Guatemala and Nicaragua. He was probably responsible in some way for the "contract" crews.

In contrast to our earlier contacts with the Company, at Retalhuleu and at Puerto Cabeza we were in close contact with Company people at both stations. By "close" I don't mean that we necessarily did business or had personal dealings with everyone in the two camps. But we did live together, eat together and use the same facilities. We drank at the same camp bars and would shoot a game of darts or pitch horseshoes with whomever happened to be

CENTRAL AMERICA

around. Everyone knew everyone else, but on a first name basis only. Everyone did *not* know what everyone else's duties and responsibilities might be, however. This was not a deliberately contrived state of affairs, but was more a product of the unusual work schedules of the pilots and aircrew. So, except for the men who were our active working superiors in the flying department, we often had no idea what another person's duties and responsibilities might be, where he stood in our table of organization, or what his rank and branch of service back in the States was. Also, the fact that a particular individual might have a comparatively minor role, at least ostensibly, did not mean that he might not be a high ranking officer in one of the military services—either on active duty or retired.

The immediate superiors of the pilots in our group were Vic and Connie. They were both pilots. It is my impression that both Vic and Connie were permanent employees of the Company—as distinguished from men like Mac and Eric who, I believe, may have been regular Air Force officers on detached duty with the Company, or like Reid Doster who was on extended leave from his Air Guard unit, or like ourselves, who had simply been hired temporarily to do a specific job.

Vic and Connie were subordinate to Larry. Larry was not a pilot. I met Larry the day after I returned from my first flight to Puerto Cabeza. I was at the club in the afternoon watching some men pitch horseshoes. A C-46 appeared at the far end of the field flying at about 600 feet. The aircraft made one pass down the length of the field, circled and went back for another pass. On the first pass I saw a man standing in the open door of the aircraft. Someone said Larry was going to jump. I didn't know who Larry was, but on the second pass he did jump and was followed by about 30 Cubans. All landed within the confines of the base, between the barracks and the fence along the east side. It was a good drop considering the restrictions of the drop zone. The Cubans were picked up and carried away in a truck. In about fifteen minutes Larry came wandering into the Club. I

had assumed that he was an instructor for the parachute troops. It turned out that Larry was the head man in overall charge of the operation. Larry was a tall man in his mid-forties. He was quiet and low-key in words and in action. He was a permanent Company employee and he very obviously had a substantial military background. I don't know why Larry was jumping with the Cubans. Maybe just to keep his hand in.

Al and Frank were in charge at Puerto Cabeza until Larry moved over. All three were superior to General Doster—which may suggest the kind of talent that was available in the field for the Bay of Pigs operation. Al, I am certain was an Air Force officer. I am almost equally certain that Frank was a permanent employee of the Company. If this sounds like a confusing and inefficient chain of command, it was not. There was no real reason for us to know the precise chain of command as long as we knew from whom to take our orders—and there was never any question about that. As a practical matter I was almost always in an airplane, or in bed and I was not particularly interested in trying to sort everyone out into their respective branches of the military or Company service. The point is (a point which seems to have been lost in many of the critiques on the Bay of Pigs operation) the leadership was highly professional.

The transition from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabeza continued through the first week in April. An increasing number of flights between the two bases moved the last of the materiel and personnel from Retalhuleu to the staging base in Nicaragua. On my next to last flight, just before a three day lull in activities, my cargo was aluminum outboard motorboats. Don Gordon and Ernie King made a flight to Miami to pick up Miro Cardona who came to Retalhuleu to speak to the Cubans and to tour their training camps. I'm sure it was a flight Mr. Cardona will not forget. Don told me that the return flight from Miami was through an almost continuous line of heavy thunderstorms. Although he may not be aware of it, it came close to being Mr. Cardona's last flight. Ernie had misjudged

his position and started to descend too early. Over Guatemala the aircraft broke out into the clear momentarily, just long enough for Don to see the top of a thirteen thousand foot peak directly ahead. He had just time to take the controls, bank steeply and pull up. Don said they missed crashing into the peak by what he judged to be a matter of feet.

Everything began to point to fast approaching D-day. Hal McGee, Vic, Connie and Larry had all moved to Puerto Cabeza. All of the B-26 pilots, with the exception of Don Gordon, had long since moved from Retalhuleu. Mac had arrived on one of his periodic flights from Miami during the night of April 7. I found him comfortably ensconced at the Bar when I came in from Puerto Cabeza at 6 o'clock in the morning on April 8. Mac said he was staying to help fly the troops over to the other side. Later that day, and also on the following day, C-54's flown by the contract crews began to arrive in Retalhuleu. By mid-afternoon on April 9 there were ten C-54's and three C-46's lined up on the narrow taxi strip. Late that same afternoon Larry and Frank came in from Puerto Cabeza. They said the invasion forces would begin coming down from their training camps the next night for the flight to Nicaragua where they would board the ships that were lying just off shore at Puerto Cabeza. That night we all wore our side arms to bed. Some even drew sub-machine guns and put them under their bunks. None of us had a great deal of faith in the ability of the Guatemalan guards to hold off a determined attack by communist guerillas if they decided to make the try. There were continuing rumors that the guerillas were still operating in the hills. If they planned a raid, this would be the logical time for it. The long line of transport aircraft on the field was ample evidence that a major movement of the Cuban invasion forces was imminent. All the guerillas had to do was wreck the first aircraft in the line, if they could get on the field, and the remaining planes would be stuck. So, for that matter, would we be.

On the way up the ramp to bed in the penthouse later that night I stumbled over a prone

figure on the roof. Already nervous, I started to reach for the 45 on my belt.

"Goddamit, Buck, can't you see?"

It was Phil, complete with tommy-gun and a couple of drums of ammunition.

"What in hell do you think you're doing, Phil? I almost plugged you."

"I'm spending the night here," Phil said. "Those bastards can get over that fence easy—before that bunch of boy scouts down at the end of the field even know what's happening. Do you realize what kind of shape we're in here? You better get your gun and come out here with me. We can take turns sleeping."

"I've already got my gun," I said. "In fact I almost shot you with it. I'm going to hit that sack and I advise you to do the same."

"Not me, buddy. There's no way those guerillas won't make a try. Do you think they don't know what's going on. Look at that ramp. Covered up with airplanes."

"Listen," I said, "If they get past the Guats we've had it—unless we can slip away in the dark. I was nervous enough to begin with. Now I'm twice as nervous with you out here with that gat. You'll either blow you own head off or shoot some Guatemalan guard patrolling the fence. Come on in here and let somebody else worry about the guerillas."

Phil struggled to his feet. "Okay. But just remember about 3 o'clock this morning that I told you guys."

As we entered the penthouse a voice from Leo's bunk said, "Thank God for small favors. Now we can all get some sleep."

"How would you like to go to hell, Leo," Phil said.

An hour after dark on the night of April 10, a long convoy of trucks entered the base at Retalhuleu. Brigade 2506 began to board the aircraft which would transport them on the first leg of their trip to the Bay of Pigs.

Throughout the period when we were flying day and night in Central America, newspapers in the United States continued to report "invasion" activities in Florida and

Guatemala. Fortunately, no one discovered the base at Puerto Cabeza. However, recriminations and accusations between irate governments continued to fill the air, and propaganda campaigns on all sides were stepped up.

The Guatemalan Ambassador to the United States, Carlos Alejos, said: "...Cuban leaders are meglomaniac puppets."

Alejos also said that every statement by leaders in Cuba that invasion forces were being trained in Guatemala "is an outright lie", and that Cuba's charges reflect only resentment over Havana's repeated failure to overthrow the Guatemalan government. Alejos said that the "current training of Guatemalan troops is not secret and is purely defensive."

(Carlos' brother, Roberto Alejos, owned the land on which the Cuban training camps had been established, and the land on which the air base at Retalhuleu had been constructed).

On March 22 the choice of Miro Cardona as President of the new "Revolutionary Council" was announced in New York. Asked whether the revolutionary group had received moral or financial help from the United States government, Cardona said: "Definitely, no."

On April 3, the U.S. State Department issued a pamphlet which had been prepared by President Kennedy, Arthur Schlesinger and Richard Goodwin. After summarizing the history of the Castro revolution the pamphlet concluded: "We call once again on the Castro regime to sever its links with the international communist movement, to return to the original purposes which brought so many gallant men together in the Sierra Maestra, and to restore the integrity of the Cuban revolution."

"If this call is unheeded, we are confident that the Cuban people, with their passion for liberty, will continue to strive for a free Cuba; that they will return to the splendid vision of inter-American unity and progress; and that in the spirit of Jose Marti, they will join hands with other republics in the hemisphere in the struggle to win freedom."

Newspaper reporters had not been idle during this same period. Miro Cardona's tour of

BAY OF PIGS

Guatemalan training camps in April was reported in the New York Times, as was the heavy purchase of medical supplies and blood plasma in Miami by Cuban doctors.

Newspaper stories also described the recruiting and uniforming of Cuban volunteers in Miami, the trips by truck to the deactivated Navy base at Opalaka, and the flights at night to Guatemala in unmarked planes.

In Guatemala, New York Times reporter Paul P. Kennedy nosed in uncomfortably close. On April 9 Kennedy was expelled from Guatemala. The only explanation given was that he had "reported something about an alleged invasion of Cuba by Guatemala." It seems that Kennedy had

planned a trip to Retalhuleu over the weekend. Next day, April 10, Kennedy was allowed to return to Guatemala City where he saw President Ydigoras. Asked about rumors of the invasion President Ydigoras said that he had read some stories but that was all he knew.

On the night of April 11, we flew the last of the Cuban brigade from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabeza. I never returned to Retalhuleu. I assume that it reverted to the exclusive use and occupancy of the Guatemalan military forces—no doubt to the vast and utter relief of President Ydigoras and his government.

THE BAY OF PIGS

My last flight from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabeza was on Tuesday, April 11. Ray, the Company pilot who had been "exposed" by Earl back in Fort Lauderdale, flew with me. Leo was flight engineer, and Ferd "Magellan" was also on board.

The U.S. military instructors who had trained the Cuban Brigade accompanied the troops on the trucks which brought them down from their training camp to the air base. Some of the leave-takings were emotional. There was a lot of back-slapping, embracing, imprecations to "give 'em hell", and vows to meet again soon in Havana. Later, after the invasion was over, I wondered if many of the Cubans at a squad and platoon level—having been cast ashore, so to speak, at the Bay of Pigs—might not have suffered from some lack of leadership without these men who had guided them through their entire training period. However, the thing that impressed me the most at the time about the Brigade was the fact that each man was armed with an automatic weapon and carried a small portable radio receiver. If necessary, it seemed, the individual soldier, if he found himself on his own, would have plenty of fire power at his command and he would also be able to maintain contact with the Brigade's headquarters and the invasion leaders.

It was after midnight when we landed at Puerto Cabeza. We were guided off the runway onto one of the hardstands. The area was crowded with Company personnel and Cubans in uniforms. They were all milling around in the lights of a half-dozen trucks lined up alongside the ramp. The trucks were quickly filled with the men we had brought in from Retalhuleu. The Company people mounted jeeps and took off down the runway in the direction of the harbor, followed by the trucks. In a few minutes Leo, Ferd and I were left standing alone on the dark ramp beside the aircraft. Ray had disappeared. The three of us walked in silence across the deserted field toward the camp. A long row of B-26's squatted in the darkness along the far side of the runway. As we passed we could see clusters of rockets mounted under the wings of many of the aircraft.

Most of the tents were dark as we entered the camp. Half-way down the company street a light burned outside the entrance to the compound, and lights were on in the operations shack and the communications center just inside the gate. A few people were moving around at the far end of the street by the mess tent. We found Riley Shamburger, Vic and Connie hunched over cups of coffee.

"Well, I see you lucked out again", Riley said.

"I think we just brought in the last bunch," I said. "Will we be going back over in the morning?"

Riley raised his eyebrows at Vic.

"That's your last trip for a while, Buck. A couple of days anyway," Vic said. "You may make another run later this week. I don't know. But the aircraft will be tied up here tomorrow and the next day."

"Will we be flying?" Leo asked.

"No, we're going to be checking out Cubans on the fifty-fours".

"I didn't even know we had any Cuban fifty-four pilots," Leo said. "What are they going to do?"

"As a matter of fact, we've got several Cuban crews for the fifty-fours. They've been over here in camp while you've been airlifting."

"How about you guys giving out with some poop," I said. "All the troops are on the boats. The B-26's are armed—or most of them. The big commotion must be getting pretty close."

"Well, closer than it was yesterday," Riley grinned.

"Oh, crap," Leo said.

"Stay in the sack as long as you feel like it in the morning, and hang loose. We'll be getting you some word pretty soon."

"Hang loose, my ass," Leo said. "That's all we ever hear. 'Hang loose,' 'Stand by.' 'We'll be in touch.' Nobody ever knows their butt from a hot rock."

"If a scorpion ever bites Leo, He's a dead scorpion," Connie said.

Wednesday morning, April 12, got off to a blazing hot start. An aircraft running up on the end of the runway woke me up about 9 o'clock. I was lying in a pool of sweat. Even though the side panels were rolled up, there was no air stirring in the tent and the mosquito netting around my canvass cot made it

even more oppressive. I pushed the netting aside and sat up. Leo was in the next cot. Both hands were under his head and his eyes were open, staring at the top of the tent. Without turning his head he said, "How in hell can you sleep with all that uproar?"

"What's the uproar?"

"The Cubans have been grinding around in the traffic pattern since 7 o'clock."

The C-54 at the end of the runway, less than a hundred yards from our tent, took off with a roar.

"How many of them are there?" I asked.

"Three," Leo said. "I wonder what the deal is. Looks like they're going to use Cuban crews instead of us. Also I think they've already been briefed. Have you noticed how they all stay strictly in their end of camp?"

"I haven't noticed anything, I just opened my eyes."

"I'm not talking about right now. I'm talking about have you noticed the last couple of times we've been in and out of here the Cubans have been in their tents. They've been eating by themselves and they haven't been wandering around camp and they haven't been hanging around the API. (*Airport Inn—named after the beer joint in Birmingham*). Now they're being marched in formation to the crapper. I just saw Hal escorting six of them up the hill."

The six-man privy was located on a knoll about fifty yards east of our tent. From the direction of the knoll came a fusillade of sharp rapping sounds, like two boards being slapped together. Framed screens on hinges were used to cover each individual position in the facility. However, an occasional scorpion had been known to take position on the underneath side of the boards alongside one of the utility holes. One victim who had been ambushed on a late evening call had been flown back to a hospital in Miami lying on his stomach. Afterwards it became a standard procedure to give a few sharp raps with the screened lid before assuming a final position. At that, the whole thing was extremely inhibiting, and most of us suffered from some

degree of "irregularity" throughout our stay in camp. It was some time after I returned home before I could break myself of the habit of banging away with the toilet lid in the family john.

In a few minutes a file of men appeared on the path leading from the knoll. They disappeared in the direction of the Cuban part of camp with Hal McGee bringing up the rear.

"What do you think all this means, Leo?" I asked. "Have you got any scoop from anybody?"

"No, and neither have any of the other guys who've been over here a while. Nobody's said anything to them about flying. It looks like the Cubans are going to fly the B-26's too. Did you know Joe and Ron left for Miami this morning?"

"Miami? What are they going to do in Miami?"

"Hell, I don't know."

"Let's go over next door and see if they know anything."

The B-26 pilots, who had all been in camp at Puerto Cabeza for several weeks, lived in the tent next to the one which I occupied with Leo, Ernie, Phil, Gordon and Sandy. The other members of our crew were scattered around the camp wherever they had been able to find empty cots. Don Gordon, Bill Peterson and Al Walters were in their tent next door when we ducked in under the side panel.

"Well, look what the cat dragged in," Al said. "Have a beer."

"Beer! Hell, I haven't even eaten breakfast."

"That's what I mean. Have a beer."

"Look, do you guys know anything?"

"We thought you'd know something," Bill said. "You're the one's that have been doing all the flying back and forth."

"Do you mean to tell me you guys have been sitting on your ass over here for three weeks and you don't even know what's going on?" Leo said.

"We can't even get the time of day," Don said. "So we just relax and enjoy life on the Caribbean."

"We heard Joe and Ron left for Miami this morning," I said.

"That's right. Riley sent for them about an hour ago. They came back and grabbed some shaving gear and said they were going to Miami on a C-46. And they don't know what they're doing either."

"God amighty."

"You said it, Buck. How about pitching some horseshoes?" Bill said.

"Horseshoes?"

"Horseshoes. Right out back of your tent."

"Let me have one of those beers first."

"See? Now you're getting the idea. How about you, Leo?"

"Jesus Christ," Leo said.

The Birmingham group continued to relax, pitch horseshoes, drink beer, raid other tents for books and magazines of any vintage, and speculate endlessly. Activity in the compound continued almost around the clock and the Company brass became almost incommunicado. Cuban personnel were highly restricted and continued to be shepherded around in small groups. All personnel were restricted to the base—which meant that no one could drive the half-mile into Puerto Cabeza. Hard liquor became scarce, although the supply of beer in the API was inexhaustible. Rumors piled on top of rumors. No one had any solid information or hard facts, but the invasion forces were on their transports in the harbor, belts of 50-calibre ammo were being loaded and rockets installed under the wings of the B-26's on the line, and the time for launching the invasion of Cuba was obviously only a matter of hours away.

Thursday morning, April 13, at 11 o'clock, a Lockheed Super-Constellation with U.S. Air Force markings still plainly visible through a hastily applied coat of paint, landed on the runway at Puerto Cabeza. Jullio Rebull, who was on ramp duty at the ammo shed, saw

some of the passengers changing out of uniforms into civilian slacks and shirts before debarking. The dozen or so passengers were driven directly from the aircraft to camp where they went into a five hour session with our base commanders in the API. The tarpaulin side panels were lowered around all four sides and two Company security officers stood guard to keep the parade of curious men scuffling up and down the company street out of earshot. The aircraft's pilots remained on board. When the meeting broke up in the middle of the afternoon the visitors were escorted on a brief inspection tour of the aircraft on the line. Then they reboarded the Connie and took off before dark.

Leo, who was as uninhibited then as he was the day he signed on, encountered Vic at the gate to the compound and asked him who the people were and what they were doing. Vic said they were some men who had come down from Washington to make a final "accounting" of the Company's books. The idea of a plane-load of bookkeepers flying all the way from Washington to inspect a set of ledgers in a stifling tent on the edge of an equatorial jungle really cracked us up. As usual, Leo cursed the whole set-up furiously. Leo *never* became adjusted to the idea of security and he took it as a personal affront that we were not made privy to the complete plans for the campaign with all of its operational details.

We knew of course that major decisions had been made at the Thursday afternoon meeting in Puerto Cabeza, even though we had no way of even guessing at what they might be. Don Gordon had recognized Presidential Assitant McGeorge Bundy among the passengers from Washington. Richard Bissel, who was in overall charge of the project for the CIA, was also among the group.

Thursday night Riley told Don that "we're really getting close, now," and after the departure of the delegation from Washington tension began to loosen up around camp—almost in a way to suggest that perhaps up to that point no one had *really* been sure what might happen, or when. Interestingly

enough, as born out by future events, this is probably exactly the case.

On Friday, April 14, Riley came to our tent around mid-afternoon. He said that the troop transports would pull out that night and that the first mission was scheduled for the next morning. He also said the first strikes would be against Castro air fields. He didn't name the fields, and he didn't indicate where or when the troops would go ashore. However, it was a simple enough matter to extrapolate the movement of the ships at 10 knots per hour and to figure out that the troops would go ashore early Monday morning. It never occurred to anyone that they would attempt their landing in the dark, or that resistance would not be softened by preliminary bombing attacks on the beachhead, or that the invading forces would go ashore without air cover.

Our main concern at the moment was with our own role in the invasion. Although many high-level public statements have described us as "instructors", the fact is, our briefing at the time we were employed made it clear that we were being hired to perform combat missions. Our feeling was that for some reason the Cuban pilots had been substituted for us.

Riley's explanation (and he may, or may not have known better) was that everyone was so confident of success that the Cuban leaders had insisted on, and had been granted, the privilege of doing all the fighting themselves. This, of course, was not the situation at all, but at the time it seemed a reasonable, though unwelcome, explanation. We had no knowledge at the time of anything that was happening in Washington in diplomatic circles, nor in the United Nations, nor of any of the agonies of decision being made in the White House.

I wandered up on to the line late Friday afternoon. The activity there was feverish. Long trains of 500 pound bombs were being pulled around on trains of dollies and loaded into the bomb bays of the B-26's. Rockets hung under the wings of almost all of the

23 B-26's on the line. Three C-54's were lined up on the ramp across the field next to the ammo and supply shed. A row of C-46's and C-54's had been parked in the grass off the runway at the far end of the field. Some of them had been brought in by the "contract" crews who were also now in camp. These crews stuck to themselves and griped continuously about not being allowed to return to Miami. Mostly they beefed to each other in their own language—whatever it was. They apparently would have no role in the invasion, but they were not going to be allowed to depart until the invasion was underway or over.

The Birmingham aircrews sat up late Friday night drinking beer at the API. Lights were burning in the compound and there was a lot of traffic in and out of the gate—all Cubans and Company personnel. About midnight Reid, Foster and Vic joined us. Somebody beefed about our being grounded in the morning. "Don't sweat it," Reid said, "You'll all have plenty to do. Maybe a lot more than you bargained for."

I hadn't been in the sack more than a couple of hours when the Wright R-2800's began to crank up on the line, first one, then another, and another, and in minutes the cumulative roar of the powerful engines, punctuated by the occasional loud retort of a backfire, washed over the camp and the dark coastal plain.

Everyone in camp was up and struggling into pants and boots. In the darkness at the end of the runway, 150 men gathered to watch the take off of the first strike against Cuba. As each pilot got his engines running he pulled out and fell into the line of aircraft taxiing toward the take off position. One by one they took position. Red exhaust flames turned to bright blue as full power was applied. The heavily loaded aircraft accelerated slowly. They were far down the runway, only the wing lights and exhaust flames visible when they broken ground. Then wings lights were switched off. We watched each aircraft until the twin pin-pricks of exhaust flame blended and disappeared into the curtain of stars across the night sky.

Bill Peterson was standing beside me in the dark. "I counted nine," he said.

"I counted nine," I said.

"Maybe this flight is for only one target," Bill said. "The rest will be taking off later."

"What time is it?"

Bill looked at his watch. "Three-thirty."

A pair of head lights approached down the runway from the portable control tower in the center of the field. It slowed and turned off into the company street, easing through the milling crowd of men who were breaking up and wandering off toward their tents. Vic, Connie, Reid and Larry were in the Jeep. The Jeep continued on down the street and parked in front of the compound gate. Bill said. "Let's go down there and see what we can find out."

Riley was in front of us headed for the compound. "Hey, Riley," Bill called. Riley stopped and turned back toward us.

"Is that all, Riley?" I asked.

Riley didn't answer. He just looked at us for a long second, then hunched his shoulders and spread both hands out wide, Riley was not happy.

Nobody went back to bed. Lights were on all over camp and every tent had its group of men huddled together on the edges of the canvass cots. The cooks started early and the mess tents were filled before daylight.

Word spread swiftly when the B-26's were due to start arriving back at the field. We pilots already had the arrival time figured out because we knew the range of the B-26's, how much time the flight to and from Cuba would take, and, based on the bomb loading, the ammo on board and the rate of fire of the 50 calibre guns, how long each aircraft would remain over its target. At 9 o'clock we were all gathered on the field waiting at the approach end of the runway again.

"Here they come," someone said.

All eyes sought out the distant speck in the sky to the east. In a few minutes we could here the throb of the engines. The first B-26

BAY OF PIGS

rounded out over the end of the runway less than fifty yards from where we stood. There was no apparent battle damage. The next aircraft carried scars of the morning's work. There were several holes in the fuselage and a gaping tear in a right wing panel. Four more aircraft landed within the next twenty minutes. All had some damage. Two still carried two or three rockets which had failed to fire. Three of the nine aircraft which had taken off failed to return. The returning aircraft were guided to parking places and the crews picked up and carried away to the compound for debriefing.

Before Saturday morning's air strike, Castro's force of serviceable aircraft had consisted of 18 planes—six Lockheed T-33 jets armed with machine guns, six ex-RAF Sea Fury prop driven fighters, and six B-26's. The exact location of all these aircraft was known prior to the launching of the first air strike. Saturday's mission was designed to destroy Castro's air force on the ground in an initial surprise attack. This was an entirely feasible objective. In April, 1961, most of Castro's experienced pilots were in Czechoslovakia undergoing training on the Mig 21's which had been made available to the Cuban government. None of these jet fighters had arrived in Cuba and Castro's air potential was actually quite meager.

Of the nine B-26's which took off on Saturday morning, April 15, one, flown by a Cuban squadron commander, Captain Zuniga, flew directly to Miami where it landed with one prop feathered and carrying evidence of battle damage. This had been inflicted on the ground in Nicaragua before his departure. Captain Zuniga's flight was intended to establish that the attacks on Castro's air bases that morning had been conducted by defecting pilots from his own air force. This camouflage was designed for the eyes of the rest of the world, and to provide an initial propaganda base for a new government when it was established. There was no possibility that Castro would be under any misapprehension as to what was taking place, nor that the story would hold up very long under the hard

scrutiny of foreign governments with adequate sources of information in Cuba and throughout Latin America. Since the Zuniga flight, and his story of defecting pilots in Cuba, established the attack against Castro on Saturday morning as one that was internally generated, it provided just enough smoke to allow the Soviet government to turn its eyes away from something it couldn't afford to see and ignore without losing face in its other spheres of influence around the world. It got Khrushchev off the hook. If this is not an entirely correct analysis, at least it seems reasonable, and there is no way to believe that any one, anywhere, would assume that Castro had been deposed without massive covert assistance from the United States.

The other eight aircraft which took off from Puerto Cabeza on Saturday morning were directed to three targets. Three of the aircraft attacked the airfield at Camp Columbia in Havana; three of the planes attacked the field at San Antonio de los Banos, just outside Havana; the other two aircraft attacked the airport at Santiago on the southeast coast. One of the aircraft was shot down and crashed in the harbor at Havana. One of the aircraft, low on gas, landed at the U.S. Navy Base at Key West—where it was gassed up and quickly returned to Puerto Cabeza. Another, low on gas, landed at Grand Cayman Island, a British possession.

Confirmation of the success of the Saturday raid came quickly through intelligence reports and from U-2 reconnaissance photographs. Twelve of Castro's 18 combat aircraft had been destroyed. He was left with six serviceable aircraft—two T-33's, two Sea Furies, and two B-26's. One of the B-26's was shot down by ground fire on Monday. The Cuban exiles had lost two. The initial surprise had been complete, but no one in camp at Puerto Cabeza explained why only eight of our aircraft had been used on the strike. As many as 22 aircraft could have been launched with the probable result that Castro would have been left completely powerless in the air for the remainder of the campaign. If this had been

THE BAY OF PIGS

accomplished, the Bay of Pigs story would have had a different ending.

Reconnaissance photographs taken by U-2's had also revealed a heavy concentration of armored equipment, tanks, trucks and tractor drawn artillery in a field next to the Cuban military academy. This armored equipment was to have been one of the targets for a raid on Sunday morning. We learned late Saturday that there would be no mission on Sunday. There was growing evidence of consternation in the echelons of command at Puerto Cabeza. The brass was sticking close to the operations center and they weren't talking. Larry, Al, Reid, Riley, and Hal McGee only left their wire enclosed compound to eat. Their demeanor, which was serious and reflected discouragement, did not invite intrusion.

We spent Sunday in idleness. There were a few desultory horseshoe contests back of the tent, but mostly we spent the day discussing the situation, and speculating on areas where the Brigade would land next morning. None of us knew enough about the south coast of Cuba or its terrain to come up with even a half-way educated guess. We did know that whatever advantages had been achieved by the unexpectedness of Saturday morning's surprise attack were rapidly being dissipated by the failure to follow up. We also believed that the delegation from Washington which had visited camp on Thursday was somehow responsible for cutting down to eight the number of aircraft that had participated in Saturday's strikes—although we were unable to arrive at a logical explanation for the cut-back.

There was considerable activity on the line all day Sunday. Battle damage was being repaired, pre-flight inspections made and, in the afternoon, the aircraft were re-armed, bombs were loaded and rockets attached in preparation for the Monday missions which, obviously, would include air support for the invasion forces when they went ashore.

It never occurred to anyone that there would be no mission on Monday morning.

There was still no word that any of us would fly. We turned in early planning to be up for the take-off next morning.

When I opened my eyes Monday morning Leo was shaking me. In the half light of early dawn I could see people beginning to stir in the tents around us. It was almost as if the entire camp had awakened simultaneously. Men began to appear in silent groups outside their tents. Take off time had come and gone. The Monday morning strike had not been launched—and it would not be. I pulled on my boots and without lacing them left the tent and plodded the short distance to the end of the runway. All of our B-26's squatted in a long row on the silent field. Early morning dew opaqued the closed canopies and dripped from the rockets and external gas tanks slung under their wings. Whisps of ground fog drifted aimlessly along the edge of the woods on the far side of the field.

Six hundred miles away across the Caribbean, elements of the Cuban brigade were still struggling ashore at the Bay of Pigs under a continuous attack by Castro's unopposed handful of operational aircraft which ranged unrestricted and unchallenged over the beachhead. Castro's militia and armored columns had begun to move down the roads from the north and the east.

The story of the three day battle at the Bay of Pigs has already been told many times. Because I have no personal knowledge of what happened on the beaches and on the roads leading into the Zapata swamps, I shall confine myself here to a brief summary drawn from accounts of Cubans who *were* there, and with some of whom I have talked since.

Wherever men enter into armed conflict with one another, inevitably the brave and the dedicated find themselves fighting alongside those who discover in the death and destruction of battle that they are devoid of physical courage, and alongside others who learn that they are, in the final analysis, dedicated primarily to their own self preservation. This was true in the swamps that surround the Bay of Pigs; it was also true on the ships at sea

BAY OF PIGS

and in the air. In the main, however, the men who made up the 2506 Brigade of Cuban freedom fighters fought a courageous battle against overwhelming odds, and they prevailed until the very end.

The Bay of Pigs is a 20-mile indentation in the south coast of Cuba 75 miles southeast of Havana. It is entirely surrounded by dense swamps. Playa Larga is located at the fathermost reach of the Bay. The town of Giron is on the south coast at the eastern side of the funnel-shaped entrance to the bay. San Blas is twenty miles north-northeast of Giron. Cienfuegos is fifty miles east down the coast from Giron. A major highway runs north and south through Matanzas province connecting Playa Larga with Central Australia where a large sugar mill and an airport is located. Another highway parallels the east shore of the Bay of Pigs connecting Playa Larga with Giron. Giron is connected with Cienfuegos by a highway which parallels the south coast of Cuba. A major highway connects Giron with San Blas, where, at a Y-branch, it continues northeast to Yaguaramas and north-northeast to Cavadonga. Except for two narrow gauge railways, these roads provide the only access to Giron and the Bay of Pigs, and, by the same token, the only egress from the Bay of Pigs. It was on these roads and in the air above that the battle of the Bay of Pigs took place.

The Brigade forces started ashore before daylight on Monday morning, April 17. The Brigade and its supplies had been transported from Puerto Cabeza in six ships. They were the *Houston*, the *Rio Escondido*, the *Atlantico*, the *Barbara J.* the *Caribe* and the *Blagar*. The *Houston* and the *Rio Escondido* with all supplies on board were sunk by Castro air force planes soon after daylight on Monday morning. The captain of the *Houston* managed to maneuver to within 250 yards of the west shore of the Bay of Pigs where he grounded his ship. Members of the Brigade's Fifth Battalion went over the side into the sea. Some made their way to shore. Many were killed by strafing aircraft and by sharks. The *Rio Escondido* went down at sea off Giron. Many of the troops still on board

this ship were drowned attempting to swim ashore or were killed by aircraft and by sharks. The other four ships departed the area after disembarking their troops. The American officers of all four of these ships had to contend later with near mutinies by their Cuban crews. One, the *Caribe* steamed south and never returned to the scene. Eventually the *Atlantico*, the *Barbara J.* and the *Blagar* rendezvoused fifty miles at sea south of Giron. The ships officers were unable to persuade the Cuban crews to unload the cargo into LCU's for the trip to the beach. In the end they unloaded the cargo themselves, but it never reached shore.

Brigade parachute troops under the command of Captain De Valle dropped north of Playa Larga to hold the road to Central Australia. Their heavy equipment was dropped first, and lost in the swamps. Another advance unit was lost in the swamps. Still another unit widely missed its drop zone. The road to Central Australia was left open.

One battalion of the Cuban freedom fighters under the command of Ernesto Oliva occupied the town of Playa Larga. This battalion held against overwhelmingly superior forces until the last round of ammunition had been fired. Armed with tanks, 75 and 57 millimeter recoilless rifles, mortars, bazookas and automatic weapons for each soldier, Oliva's force fought a battle that is a lasting testimony to his leadership and to the training and determination that had been instilled in the men at their training base in Guatemala.

On the eastern front an equally courageous and determined battle was waged at Cavadonga, and on the road south of Yaguaramas and, later, at San Blas. In the end, superior numbers, the unchallenged freedom of the skies, and the final exhaustion of the Brigade's ammunition prevailed. By Wednesday afternoon the Brigade's line of defense had shrunk to a perimeter less than three miles in diameter around Giron. The battle was ended. The invasion had failed. The operation was reduced to individual efforts to escape into the depths of the Zapata

THE BAY OF PIGS

swamps and in pitifully inadequate open boats at sea. Much, much too late, President Kennedy authorized two U.S. Navy destroyers to escort the *Blagar*, the *Barbara J.* and the *Atlantico* to the beach to evacuate the remnants of Brigade 2506. "Hold on," they messaged the beach, "we're coming. We're coming with everything."

"How long?" asked Brigade Commander San Roman.

"Three to four hours."

"That's too long. You won't be here on time. Farewell, my friends, I'm signing off."

In his book, Haynes Johnson quotes one sailor as saying, "All the Americans started crying."

The ships turned back and took up a course out to sea.

At the air base in Puerto Cabeza we knew by now that things were going from bad to worse. Company personnel wore looks of perpetual concern when they made infrequent appearances outside the compound. Only the people in the compound who had access to radio and teletype facilities knew what was happening. In our tents by the edge of the runway all we could be sure of was that more than forty eight hours had passed since the first strike had been launched on Saturday, and we knew that the element of surprise had been irretrievably lost. We heard through the grapevine that the Saturday mission had been successful as far as it went, but that Castro's air force had not been completely destroyed. We still didn't know what targets had been struck, but we couldn't help being aware that with only eight aircraft our effort must have been spread very thin. Knowing that the invading forces were without air cover, we believed that the ships were still at sea and that the landing was being postponed, or even cancelled. At noon on Monday word filtered down the line that this was not the case, that, in fact, the landing was made before daylight and was still in progress. We learned that the landing had been made at the Bay of Pigs. We had never heard of it, and without access to maps or charts, nobody knew precisely where on the coast the Bay was located.

Shortly after noon we got word that Vic and Connie were going to the beach in two B-26's. They took off together shortly before three o'clock. They hit the coast and came in off the Bay of Pigs right on the deck at Playa Larga. On the road north of Playa Larga, where Oliva was holding, they discovered a convoy of sixty or seventy trucks heading south toward Oliva's position with a militia force numbering nearly a thousand men. The two aircraft separated. Vic got the lead truck in the convoy with one rocket. Connie plugged the road at the north end by destroying the last vehicle in the line. The convoy came to a halt. Vic and Connie made pass after pass up and down the road, bombing and strafing the stalled trucks. They killed more than nine hundred men and left two miles of highway in a sheet of flame.

On Tuesday six B-26's flown by Cuban crews took off from Puerto Cabeza. Again their primary targets were Castro air fields. When they arrived over their targets before dawn a heavy cloud cover obscured the ground. The aircraft did not carry enough fuel to permit holding until the cloud formation began to break up after daylight. The mission was not a total loss, however, at least one of the pilots leaving the San Antonio de los Banos area turned southeast toward the Bay of Pigs instead of heading directly south toward Puerto Cabeza. Early morning cloud formations occur over land areas, not over the sea. When the pilot of the B-26 arrived over the beachhead at the Bay of Pigs he found the cloud cover beginning to break up along the coast and he let down through one of the breaks and continued flying with visual reference to the ground. While he was trying to orient himself and identify the limits of the enemy advances, he found himself under attack by Castro's depleted but still active air forces—which were out early in support of the fast growing, three-pronged assault against the Brigade's shrinking beachhead. In a brief dog-fight the Brigade B-26 eliminated one of Castro's two remaining Sea Furies. An indirect assist for this victory should be credited to Joe Harbert—who had been asked by the pilot during training what defensive

actions could be taken by a B-26 under attack by a faster, single-engine fighter. In training flights which followed, Joe demonstrated the superior stability and maneuverability of the B-26 which made it possible to execute a tight turn with a much narrower radius than any conventional fighter could follow. In combat a B-26 under attack by a Sea Fury can quickly get out of the sights of the attacking aircraft by executing such a turn. If the fighter attempts to keep the B-26 in its sights, the pilot will be forced to tighten up his turn to a point where his aircraft will stall out and spin—in the recovery from which he will lose several thousand feet.

Under attack by a Castro Sea Fury, the Brigade pilot attempted precisely these evasive tactics. The sea Fury pilot, instead of breaking off the attack, attempted to turn with the B-26, stalled out of the turn, and spun into the Bay of Pigs, since he did not have sufficient altitude to recover from the spin.

In a dog-fight with another of Castro's aircraft the B-26 was so badly damaged that it was forced to make a crash landing close to the airstrip at Giron. The pilot was injured and the co-pilot was killed. A C-46 landed at Giron next morning, with Ferd on board as navigator, picked up the injured pilot, and returned him to Puerto Cabeza.

Another of the pilots on the Tuesday morning raid failed to return. Since the only reported air action took place over the Bay of Pigs where the first Brigade B-26 was forced to land, it was assumed that the missing plane had wandered off course on the return flight to Puerto Cabeza and had run out of gas. An air-sea rescue search was launched from Puerto Cabeza, but the missing aircraft and pilot were never found.

Late Tuesday afternoon Connie and Vic made a return flight to Cuba, arriving well after dark. Again the target areas were obscured by cloud cover, and they were forced to return to base with their bomb loads intact.

As of the close of business Tuesday, the Brigade forces had lost four aircraft. One was

landed at Miami on Saturday morning, one was shot down at Havana on Saturday morning; one was shot down on Tuesday, and one was lost at sea on Tuesday. The aircraft that landed at Key West Navy Air Base and at Grand Cayman Island on Saturday were returned to the base at Puerto Cabeza.

Tuesday afternoon Gil Hutchinson, a senior non-commissioned officer in the U. S. Air Force who was in charge of the communications center, came to me and said that General Doster wanted me to get a crew together to make a drop from a C-54 at daylight Wednesday morning. The C-54 was already loaded and waiting on the ramp. I chose Phil Chapman to go with me as co-pilot. I would rather have had Gordon, who was the best pilot of us all, but I thought that there might be more supply missions to be flown next day—in which case Gordon should be available as a first pilot. Ernie had a world of flying experience, but I didn't want to get into a situation where I would have to argue with him about how to handle the mission. Fred Ealey was as much of an unknown quantity in Nicaragua as he had been in Florida. I had flown with him once on a flight from Retalhuleu to Puerto Cabeza. He had turned on final approach a mile from the end of the runway at an altitude of 1500 feet and had shown every intention of trying to land the aircraft from this position—an impossibility. I was still not convinced that Fred could handle the aircraft competently. I knew that if I got hurt Phil could get us back, and I knew that I wouldn't have any trouble with him about going in—no matter what the situation was at the beach. Sandy Sanders asked to go as flight engineer, which was fine with me. Sandy was not the greatest guy in the world with charts and manuals, but he was tough as nails and a good man to have along if we should have to join the boys on the beach. I planned to take along a couple of sub-machine guns and station Sandy at an open window back in the cabin. He couldn't have hit anything, of course, but the muzzle blast of a gun firing from a supposedly unarmed transport plane might have surprised an attacker

long enough to make him miss on his first pass.

At 7 o'clock Tuesday night General Doster sent for the B-26 pilots. There were only three left in camp, Don Gordon, Bill Peterson and Pete Ray. Al Walters had been flown to Grand Cayman Island to pick up the B-26 which had landed there low on fuel after Saturday's mission. Joe Harbert and Ron Smith were still in Miami—doing what, we didn't know.

The pilots found Reid, Al, Larry, Hal McGee and Riley Shamburger in the operations shack. A montage of aerial photographs of the beach was fastened to one wall. Reid didn't waste any time or words.

"This thing has gone to hell," he said. "Most of the Cubans have quit and we need volunteers for a mission in the morning."

Hal McGee and Riley Shamburger, who knew what was coming, immediately volunteered. They were followed by Don, Bill, and Pete. Reid turned down Hal's and Riley's offer on the grounds that they were operational people who knew entirely too much to be exposed to the risk of capture. Of the Cuban pilots, Gonzalo Herrera and his co-pilot were the only ones still willing to fly. The mission that was made up in the operations shack Tuesday night consisted originally of four aircraft. There was a general discussion of targets. Don and Herrera were assigned the roads leading east out of Giron toward Cienfuegos and northeast in the direction of Yaguaramas. Don agreed to take the highway paralleling the beach, while Herrera would proceed to the area around San Blas and along the highway leading toward Yaguaramas. Bill was instructed to take the road leading north out of San Blas toward Covadonga. Pete was assigned to the western front and the highway which had been hit by Vic and Connie on Monday afternoon.

After the briefing Riley and Don spent several hours in the API. They discussed the next morning's mission. Riley sent Don to bed around eleven. Up to the time Don took

off at 3:30 the next morning he did not know, nor did the other three pilots know, that Hal and Riley would be given permission to fly.

I was in Doc Barr's tent next to the mess tent when Riley found me shortly after midnight. Riley informed me that a mission had been formed for the next morning and that he wanted me to fly with him as observer and co-pilot. (There were no dual controls on the B-26. The only way a second pilot could do any flying was to swap seats in flight with the pilot). Riley said he would line up other C-54 pilots to ride as observers on the other planes. In my opinion this was an excellent idea. A trained and experienced pilot in the observer's seat would have been able to keep a sharp lookout for hostile aircraft while the pilot was concentrating on his targets. I discussed the next morning's mission with Riley for a few minutes before he left to round up the other C-54 pilots.

As I passed the entrance to the compound on the way back to my tent, Reid Doster called to me from the operations building. Reid said that he had cancelled plans for the C-54 pilots to ride as observers and had substituted non-pilot members of our crews. I protested because I felt that pilots would be far more effective, but Reid was adamant. He did not want to risk all of his pilots on the one mission in a few aircraft. Leo Baker was assigned to fly with Riley in my place; Wade Gray, one of our radio operators went with Pete Ray; Jack Vernon was assigned to Don's aircraft, and Gonzalo Herrera already had his observer. One of the Cuban B-26 pilots agreed to fly with Hal McGee. Red Cornish was not assigned to a flight, and Sandy was already scheduled to fly on the C-54 drop the next morning.

After Riley finished talking to Don at the API he had returned to the operations building where he and Hal were able to persuade Reid that the mission over the beaches the next morning offered the only hope of keeping the invasion alive, and that consequently every available pilot and aircraft should be committed to this last ditch effort. Reid had finally given his permission for them to fly.

At 1:30 in the morning I gave up trying to change Reid's mind about the co-pilots and left word for the orderly to awaken me, Phil and Sandy at 2:30. The orderly woke Phil up at 2:30 as instructed. Phil said that he would rouse me and Sandy. When he came to my tent, however, Phil by-passed my bunk and waked Ernie, who agreed to get up and fly the mission with Phil. Phil explained this later by saying that he was still under the impression I was going on the B-26 raid. I was still sound asleep when they took off, and I slept right through the departure of the six B-26's. When I finally opened my eyes it was broad daylight.

The six B-26's were scheduled to take off in pairs at thirty minute intervals. Don and Herrera would take off first at 3 o'clock, followed by Bill and Pete at 3:30 and Hal and Riley at 4:00. While they were taxiing to the runway Herrera's co-pilot leaped from the aircraft and disappeared into the woods surrounding the camp. Herrera took off alone. Don discovered that his radio receiver was not working. The radio trouble took thirty minutes to repair, and Don took off thirty minutes behind Herrera, Pete and Bill. Don was followed thirty minutes later by Hal and Riley. After the first four aircraft had departed, word came that the President had authorized U.S. Navy carrier-based jets to fly cover over the beach for an hour between 6:30 and 7:30. Reid jumped on the wing of Riley's aircraft and passed this information on to him before he and Hal took off.

Don used almost all of the 5,000-ft. runway to become airborne. The heavily burdened aircraft climbed slowly out over the dark water while Don focused intently on his instruments. He leveled off at 9,000 feet and set up a cruise power setting which would give him a true airspeed of 230 mph. When he checked his guns high over the Caribbean he discovered that they would not fire. "I'll do what I can with the rockets and the napalm," he said to Jack.

When he had been in the air two hours Don began a rapid descent toward the sea. He flew the last fifty miles at 500 ft. Ahead of

him Bill and Pete were chattering on the radio. Bill had found a heavy concentration of enemy militia and equipment on the road from San Blas to Covadonga and he was giving them hell. Pete did not say what targets he had found, but several times he expressed concern about his remaining fuel. He said that he might have to land somewhere first in order to make it back to Puerto Cabeza. He mentioned Key West and the Navy base at Guantanamo. As Don approached the coastline he heard Pete say "We're going in." Don interpreted this as meaning that Pete was leaving the target area and making for one of the other of the two bases to refuel. Actually, Pete and Leo had been shot down. They crashed on a sugar plantation near Central Australia in Matanzas Province.

The coastline was obscured by low-hanging broken clouds as Don approached. Don turned west, trying to pick up the entrance to the Bay of Pigs. After a few minutes flying on a westerly heading he realized he had overshot his target and turned back. The cloud cover was beginning to break up with the coming of daylight. After a few minutes flying Don found Giron and the road leading down the beach toward Cienfuegos. The Brigade forces had put out panels on the highway to mark the limit of their lines. Beyond this panel Don found scattered rolling equipment and Castro militia strung out down the highway for several miles. His first pass was at a weapons carrier which he set on fire with a rocket. Next he made a pass at a concentration of militia in process of breaking camp. It was on this pass that he discovered his napalm, carried in two external pods under the wing tips, would not release. He hit every circuit breaker and switch in the cockpit. Still the napalm would not release. He never succeeded in getting his 50-calibre machine guns to fire. Reduced to nothing but the eight rockets he carried, Don made seven more passes along the highway, firing his rockets at scattered vehicles. His eighth and last rocket did not fire. The nose of the rocket had come lose but not the aft fin. The rocket was hanging, pointed straight down, under his

right wing. Don saw nothing of Herrera and heard no transmissions from him.

Don made his last pass and turned south off the beach at 6:03 a.m. Five minutes later he heard Riley and Hal talking to each other on the radio. Don called Riley and told him that he had been unable to fire his guns and could not release his napalm. Riley and Hal who were almost over the coastline elected to attack the highway to Cienfuegos, since Don had been able to do only a limited amount of damage with his rockets.

"Did you run into any opposition, Don?" Riley asked.

"Nothing in the air. I think I got hit by ground fire in the right engine. It's running rough and losing power."

"Are you going to make it back all right?"

"If it doesn't get any worse than this I'll be okay."

"How about our little friends," Riley asked, "see anything of them?"

"Little friends?"

"We're supposed to have some little friends with us at the beach. You know, the good guys."

"I didn't see anybody."

Riley was talking about the Navy jet cover which had been authorized at the last minute. Don hadn't been informed that this cover would be provided, and he wasn't sure what Riley was talking about. In a few minutes he found out.

Don heard Hal come back on the radio. "Okay we're going in. Where are you Riley?"

"I'm behind you and to the right."

A minute later Riley said in a hoarse voice: "Hit! Hit!"

Don thought he had gotten a hit on a target. Still flying south off the beach, and well out to sea, Don keyed his own mike. "What did you hit Riley?"

Silence.

Again Don asked, "Hey Riley. What did you get?"

Hal came on the air. "T-birds! They got Riley."

Don looked at his watch. It was 6:18.

Hal was repeating the emergency call sign, asking for help from the carrier. There was no reply. "Hey Don, can you get back here and give me a hand?"

"I can come back, Hal, but I'm already fifty miles out and I don't have any 'ammo.'"

"Well, see if you can relay to the ship that we've got T-birds back here."

Don caught a movement out of the corner of his eye. He looked out to his left and saw an unmarked jet pulling into formation on his left wing. Don said later if he hadn't been strapped in he would have gone right through the canopy when he saw the jet. The jet's pilot tossed him a casual salute. Don picked up his microphone and attempted unsuccessfully to make contact. There was no response. The jet was not on the same frequency. Then Don made a series of motions with his hand, indicating that the jet should turn back and return to the beach. The jet pilot quickly got the message and peeled off into a 180 degree turn. Following the jet's turn Don saw two more jets in formation higher and farther behind. They also turned back to the beach.

Don continued to fly at 500 feet ducking in and out of the widely scattered clouds. He heard no more transmissions from Hal. South of Grand Cayman Island, which is 200 miles south of Giron, he heard Vic and Connie in radio conversation. They were on their way in to the beach, but were still well south of Don's position. Don relayed the message that Riley had been hit.

"What's the situation up there?", Vic asked.

"I don't know. Hal and Riley came in after I left. I heard Riley say he'd been hit. Then Hal said T-bird's got him."

"What about Hal?"

"I don't know. I was talking to him. Some of our little friends went back after him."

"Are they still there?" Connie asked.

"I don't know." Don said.

"They'll be gone by the time we get there," Vic said. "If the T-birds are out we can't go in. Let's do a one-eighty and head back to the base, Connie."

"I'm right behind you."

Don came back on the air. "Hey Vic. My last rocket didn't fire and I don't know what it's doing. I want to make a low pass when I get back to the field. Have somebody in the tower when I get there to tell me what it looks like."

"Okay. We'll be standing by."

Hal was in the lead when he and Riley approached the coastline. The earlier cloud cover was breaking up rapidly. Hal led the two-aircraft formation down through a large hole. Below the clouds and immediately ahead he caught sight of the long paved runway at Giron. Hal banked steeply to his right, continuing his descent, and picked up the coastline highway. Just beyond the bright colored panel set out alongside the road, the truck Don had set on fire was still pouring a column of black smoke into the sky. Armoured vehicles and troops were moving on the road east of the burning truck. It was here that Hal called asking Riley for his position. Riley was following Hal three quarters of a mile behind, off Hal's right wing. Hal opened up with his 50-calibre machine guns on a line of trucks. Finishing his run, he pulled up and into a steep turn to his left, getting into position for a pass down the road in the opposite direction. As he rolled out he saw Riley's aircraft making a pass down the road. At the same instant he saw a stream of tracers hosing in from behind and to the right of Riley's plane. Two Lockheed T-33 jets were closing on him rapidly. For a second, as Hal turned toward the three aircraft, Riley's aircraft and the two jet fighters were in his gunsight. Then Riley's right engine exploded in flame. The B-26 heeled hard over on its right wing and for a split second the jets were in Hal's sights. They flashed by him in a steep climb. Riley was flying at less than a hundred feet on his strafing run. When the first tracers from the jets went by his wing. Riley banked steeply, simultaneously jetisoning his

bombs and external napalm tanks. At that same instant he was hit. Still in a steep turn he went in from less than a hundred feet, 200 yards off the shore.

Hal saw Riley and Wade explode in the water. He made a series of steep turns trying to pick up the jets, but he never saw them again. Although Hal never saw the Navy jets flying cover over the beach, the two T-birds may have. If so, they probably cut out right after shooting Riley down.

Don's right engine grew progressively rougher as he flew south toward Puerto Cabeza. The return flight to the base took nearly four hours. Reid, Bill, and Hal were in the control tower when he made a low pass down the length of the runway.

"That thing is pointing straight down, hanging by its tail," Reid told Don on the radio. "What have you tried?"

"Nothing, yet—except all the switches and the circuit breakers. I didn't know what the situation was."

"Go back out to sea, climb up to altitude and see if you can shake that thing lose," Reid instructed. "You can't land with that rocket hanging under there. If it comes lose it'll blow you and half the base to hell and gone."

Don climbed out over the water to 5,000 feet. For thirty minutes he tried everything in the book to shake the rocket loose. Nothing worked.

"I've tried everything," he radioed the base, "and nothing happens. I'm running low on fuel. I think I'd better come in and land."

"Hold everything," Reid said. "I think you'd better come across the field at about five thousand and jump. Head the aircraft out to sea."

"Poppa, I've put six G's on this flying machine. If that won't pull it off it's not going to fall off when I grease this baby in on the runway."

Hal and Bill were for having Don land rather than attempting to bail out. After a

short conference on the ground, Reid agreed to let Don land. "Just make sure you *do* grease it in," he radioed Don, "and remember you've only got a few inches between the head of that rocket and the runway. Land well down the runway—*after* we get out of this tower."

Jack Vernon, who was riding shotgun with Don, said the wheels just started rolling on the runway. He never felt the aircraft touch down. They had been in the air nine hours and forty minutes when they landed. They learned for the first time that Pete Ray and Leo Baker had also been shot down that morning.

When I left my tent Wednesday morning I went directly to the line. It was 8:30 when I reached the control tower at the center of the field. The control tower operator was listening to a Spanish language broadcast on a short wave receiver. When I started to speak he raised his hand to silence me. He was intent on the broadcast which was difficult to pick up behind the static. "It's from Havana," he said. "They got one of our planes."

I was suddenly cold. I felt as if my scalp and the skin on my face was drawing tight.

"Who was it?"

"They're broadcasting from Havana. They say they've got the bodies of two American fliers. The only name is Leo Berle."

Berle was Leo's "phoney". I started to walk, fast, back toward the camp. A jeep was coming down the runway toward me. Larry and Al and another Company man drew up beside me.

"Have you heard the broadcast from Havana?" I asked. "It sounds like they got Pete and Leo."

"Yes, Riley, too. You've flown fifty-one's haven't you Buck?" Larry asked.

"Yes, I have. I don't have a lot of time on 'em."

"We've gotten some fifty-one's (North American F-51, one of the best of the World War II fighters) in from Managua. We've

about got the Nicaraguan markings painted out. We're hanging external ferry tanks and rockets on them. Can you take five Cuban pilots and go up to the beach?"

"Operate from the beach?"

"Yes," Al said. "We'll have gas and ammo flown in. A C-46 landed up there this morning. Now, these boys are young. They don't any of them have much time, but they've all flown some single engine. You'll have to tell them what to do."

"Are they ready?" I said. "How much time do we have?"

"Another two or three hours and they ought to be ready. We'll send the boys on up. You can be talking to them."

"How about a dash-one? (The aircraft's operation manual). It's been a few years since I've been in a Mustang."

"There's a Nic pilot over there," Al said, motioning toward the far side of the field where the six fighters were parked. "He's going to work with you, and he's got a manual."

The jeep turned and headed back toward camp. I walked across the runway to the opposite side of the field and the hardstands where the long-nosed fighters were parked. By comparison with the C-54's I'd been flying they seemed tiny and stubby-winged. It was 9:30 in the morning and the sun was like something freshly tapped from an open hearth. I could smell myself; the sweat was running off my face and down my body in streams—for more reasons than one, I imagine. Puerto Cabeza, Nicaragua, was a long way from Canada and the RCAF where I had flown a Mustang nineteen years earlier.

I found our own ordinance people working on all the aircraft—loading belts of 50-calibre ammo into the wings and installing the rockets. One crew was still painting out the ron-dels on the wings and the Nicaraguan colors from the vertical stabilizer and the rudder on one of the fighters.

The Nicaraguan pilot was squatting under a wing of one of the aircraft chewing on a cigar stump.

"Well," I said, affecting a nonchalance I was far from feeling, "I guess we're going to borrow your airplanes for a while."

"Si." He remained in his squatting position.

"Have you got a book, a manual I can be looking at?"

Without speaking the Nicaraguan pilot stood up, walked around to the far side of the airplane, climbed up on the wing and fished a thick manual out of the cockpit. "Here," he said, handing it to me.

Boy, I thought, this guy is going to be a big help. He acts as if I'm stealing his personal airplane. "You speak English don't you?" I asked. "I've got some Cuban boys on the way up and I may need some help. I don't think any of them have flown a fifty-one."

"Yeah, I speak English."

It didn't appear that this stunted dialogue was going to develop into anything productive for me, so I climbed into the cockpit of the F-51 with the operations manual and began to re-orient myself. It didn't take long, I discovered, to make myself at home. Everything was where it had always been. The years rolled away and I was back on the Tarmac in front of C Flight at RCAF Station, Trenton, Ontario.

While I was exploring the cockpit of the fifty-one a jeep rolled up with five very young looking Cuban boys aboard. They dismounted and approached the aircraft with what struck me as being an air of great reluctance—so much so, that I wondered if some one might be following behind with a gun in their backs. The first of several major problems developed immediately. Only one of the Cuban pilots could speak any English, and that one was not exactly fluent. Through him, as best I could, I learned that none of them had much total time in the air. All but one had a few hours on Sea Furies, a single-engine prop-driven fighter used by the RAF in World War II. At

least the Sea Fury was in the same category with the Mustang. The least experienced of the Cuban pilots had received advanced flying training on single engine aircraft, but had not flown high performance fighters. I could see that we were not the greatest bunch of tigers who would ever take to the air—in fact, I began to wonder if we might not constitute a greater hazard to one another than a major threat to Castro.

If time permitted, I determined to give them all a thorough cockpit check and get them into the air for at least one circle of the field before we took off together for the beach. First, using the English-speaking pilot as an interpreter, I conducted a short course in air-to-ground support operations and described the tactics we would use over the targets. We would fly in pairs. The lead aircraft would be the gun. The second aircraft would fly behind and to one side of the lead aircraft. His responsibility would be to protect the lead aircraft from attack by air, and to locate targets of opportunity and areas from which heavy ground fire originated. Then, with half of his 50-calibre ammunition remaining, the lead aircraft would swap positions and fly "tail-end-Charlie" for the second aircraft.

The aircraft would land one at a time at the airstrip at Giron for re-fueling and re-arming. While one aircraft flew cover over the field the other would land and re-fuel. After the first aircraft was refueled it would fly cover.

Another major problem was going to develop in communications. We would be able to communicate between aircraft but not with the ground forces on the beach or with the base at Puerto Cabeza. Transmitters in the Nicaraguan aircraft were set up on the wrong frequencies and there would not be time to change them. Since I could not speak Spanish and my pilots could not understand English, some lack of coordination was bound to develop. I pointed this out and explained that we would get a briefing on the situation on the beach before we took off, but that once there, we would all have to select targets based on what we could see, and what we

could learn on the ground while we were refueling.

It was close to noon when we finished the briefing. I had done all of the talking, assisted by the Nicaraguan pilot who had come to life and began to take an interest in things when the discussion got around to tactics. There was none of the lively discussion you would expect from a group of pilots who were about to launch an exciting and important mission. Perhaps it is unfair to say this, but there was a marked lack of enthusiasm. Of course the situation on the beach was desperate, and my tigers were inexperienced—but it *was* their war. It *was* their homeland and *their* buddies on the beach. It was at that moment I decided I would not *lead* the group to the beach across six hundred miles of water. I would *follow*. I made up my mind that I would fly on the wing of the lead aircraft in the second element of three; and I would keep the gun-arming switch in the cockpit in the "on" position.

The six fighters were almost ready. One of the pilots suggested lunch. I sent them ahead and told them to be back on the line in forty minutes. They had not shown up after an hour. All the aircraft were within a few minutes of being ready to go. I started back toward camp to find my tigers. They were not in either of the two mess tents. I walked up between the two rows of tents which were occupied by the Cubans. In one of the tents I found all five of my boys sacked out and sound asleep in the middle of a siesta. I shook them awake, said it was time to go to Cuba and to get their rear ends up to the line. They stumbled awake muttering and grumbling to one another in Spanish. I took a jeep that was parked in the street, stopped by the supply shed and drew six parachutes and a forty-five automatic for myself, then drove to the line. The ordinance men were gone and the Nicaraguan pilot said the aircraft were all ready to go. I looked back across the field to see if my tigers were in sight. A jeep was racing up the runway toward the hardstand. It was Al.

"Forget it, Buck, they've lost the field,"

"No place to go, huh?"

"No place to go. Come on back."

I've often wondered if the Spanish custom to enjoy a siesta after lunch may not have saved my life.

A final effort to save the situation at the Bay of Pigs was also aborted Wednesday afternoon. Reid sent for me at 2 o'clock.

"Buck, there's a C-54 loaded and ready to go up on the line. Ernie and Phil didn't get in to the beach this morning and they brought their load back. They're out of everything up there. I want you to get a crew together and make a drop. Hurry up. Get back here quick as you can and we'll give you the picture."

I found Gordon in the tent. He agreed to fly the mission with me. "Who can we get for a flight engineer?" I asked.

"Red Cornish is down eating right now. Get him."

I went to the mess tent and found Red and a group of a half-dozen men having lunch. "Come on, Red, we've got to fly a drop mission up on the beach—right away."

I was standing behind Red at the table. He didn't look up. He just set his coffee cup down on the table and kept his eyes fixed on it. I could see a bright red flush spreading over his neck and up behind his ears.

"I can't go, Buck," Red said.

At first I didn't understand him. "What do you mean, you can't go? What else have you got to do? Come on, we've got to hurry."

Red still didn't look up from the table, and he didn't move. His flush deepened. "No, I'm sorry. I just can't go."

All conversation at the table had stopped. Everyone was looking at me and Red. It wasn't that Red *couldn't* go, it was just that he wouldn't. It began to dawn on me what was happening. Sandy Sanders stood up down at the end of the table.

"You need an engineer, I'll go with you, Buck."

I looked at Sandy. He had already flown seven hours that day with Ernie and Phil. I tried one more time with Red, knowing this was a tough thing he was doing. In a half joking way I said: "Goddamn Red, forget the chow and come on. If you don't you'll be sorry"—making it sound as if he would regret missing the chance to fly a mission, but meaning something else. I knew if he persisted in his refusal he *would* be sorry. Red shook his head without speaking.

"Okay, Sandy come on." I turned and left the tent, wondering how Red was going to live this down. On the way back to the compound I told Sandy to go by the supply shack and get parachutes for everyone, automatics, and two sub-machine guns and meet us at the airplane.

"Are you going to be able to push that load out by yourself, Sandy?" I asked. "It's all on rollers, but—I don't know."

"I looked it over this morning," Sandy said, "I'll get it out all right—fast."

"Okay, me or Gordon will come back and give you a hand if you need any help."

"Don't you want me to get three tommy-guns, Buck, so we'll each have one?"

"Sandy, I'm not figuring on landing up there on the beach. Those are for you shoot out the back window with."

"Hey, that's a good idea."

"I don't know whether it is or not. You couldn't hit a bull in the ass with a bass fiddle, much less with one of those Thompsons. You'll probably shoot our rudder off."

"Aw, Buck. You shouldn't talk like that."

Gordon was in the operations shack along with Reid, Al and Frank. Four Cuban pilots were standing in one corner of the room. They took no part in the discussion that followed. They were a crew who had been asked to make the drop and had refused.

Reid pointed to the recon photos on the wall. "I don't know how much good this will do," he said. "We don't know exactly how much ground they're still holding, but it's not much. Make you're drop right along here," he

pointed to a narrow stretch of beach just east of the entrance to the Bay of Pigs, "and haul tail back here." He paused. "It's about all we can do for them now."

"How high do I have to be to drop—for the chutes to open?" I asked.

"Three hundred feet is plenty high enough, I would think. The bundles are all on static lines. If you want to go lower, go ahead. Just don't get up where you'll attract any attention."

"Don't worry about that for one second," I said. "The props on your airplane are going to be all knicked up from sand and gravel when we get back here."

Al handed Gordon a set of charts. "You got the radio frequencies?" he asked.

"Si" Gordon said, showing off his fluent Spanish.

One of the Cubans in the corner of the room followed us out the door. "Hey," he called, "I'm going also. I can push."

"You want to go with us?" Gordon said.

"You fellows want me to go along also?"

"Come on Senor," Gordon said. "Also."

It was a few minutes past three when we pulled up in the jeep alongside the C-54. Sandy was already there, inside the aircraft. Our new Cuban friend went up the ladder and through the rear cargo door. Gordon was half-way up the ladder and I was kicking a chock out from behind the nose wheel when I saw the jeep coming up the runway. The first thing I thought was that we had forgotten to pick up a parachute for the Cuban, which we had, and that someone was bringing one to us. However, it was Frank.

"Okay, fellows. Climb down," Frank said.

"What now?" I asked.

"They're wiped out," Frank said. "You'd just be dropping this stuff to the bad guys."

"Well, in other words, that's the old ball game, then?"

"That's the ball game. Then he added with more bitterness and feeling than I have ever

heard anyone from the Company express, "No hits, no runs—all errors."

Poor Red, I thought. That performance in front of all those guys in the mess tent. He'll be kicking himself in the butt for the rest of his life.

Wednesday night at the API Hal McGee told me of a proposal he had made to the command staff at Puerto Cabeza shortly after his return from the morning mission. Hal's proposal was that we salvage the invasion operation by creating an incident which would provide the U.S. government with a legitimate excuse to send the Marines and Naval air forces into Cuba.

Following the first air strike on Saturday morning, Castro had begun trumpeting in rage and leveling broadside charges of aggression at the United States. Suppose that, in his excitement and temper, Castro had been so ill advised as to retaliate with an attack on the U.S. Navy Base at Guantanamo Bay? Such an incident could have provoked an immediate response by the U.S. government which might have considered itself obliged to land a couple or more divisions of U.S. Marines—which just happened to be on maneuvers in the Caribbean at the moment. To the rest of the world this would have been an action in self defense, not aggression. It would also have marked the end of Castro's reign—which was the worthy object of the whole exercise at the Bay of Pigs in the first place.

Hal proposed to fake his incident by taking two of our own B-26's (already carrying Castro Air Force markings) from Puerto Cabeza and, by prearrangement, stage a raid on the Guantanamo Navy Base. The idea was to make a couple of strafing runs and drop a few bombs in a far corner of the base. The area would have been evacuated before hand.

For sheer cynicism, of course, the plan couldn't be matched. As an effective means for removing an armed garrison of the Soviet Union from the western hemisphere it couldn't be matched either. The proposal was turned down. Hal told me much later that he had heard that the plan had gone all

the way up the line to the White House where President Kennedy vetoed it. ("Muffed" it is the way we put it).

On Thursday Al Walters brought the stranded B-26 in from Grand Cayman Island. A few hours later Joe Harbert and Ron Smith arrived from Miami in a C-46. They had an interesting story to tell.

When they left Puerto Cabeza, before the first strike on Saturday morning, they were told only that they were going to Miami, nothing more. They arrived in Miami at the Opalaka airport where they remained throughout the invasion. The only thing they could learn about what was happening back at Puerto Cabeza and on the beaches at the Bay of Pigs was what they read in the Miami newspapers. They practically got down on their knees, but none of the Company personnel at Opalaka would tell them anything—much less why the two of them had been flown to Miami.

On Wednesday, after a week of inactivity and frustration at Opalaka, Joe and Ron were told that they had been brought to Miami to test-fly a C-46 and return it to Puerto Cabeza. Word had already spread through the news media that the invasion was foundering. The C-46 story sounded completely fishy.

"Look," Joe said, "if all we came up here for was to fly a C-46 back south you could have told us that the day we left. And we could have had the C-46 back at the base by now. You know we're not buying that, so how about it, what's happening down there and what in hell are we doing up here?"

"Well, okay. We might as well tell you," a Company representative said. "We've had two jets here all the time. Two T-birds. You and Ron were supposed to fly them. That's what you're up here for. I should say that's what you *were* up here for. They didn't use you, and don't ask me why. I don't know. And now you really *are* going to fly a C-46 back to the base, so you might as well get ready."

The final statistics after the air action at the Bay of Pigs reads something like the statistics

after a football game where the team with the most first downs, most yards rushing and most yards passing, lost the game. After Saturday's mission Castro had only six aircraft he could put into the air. One, a B-26, was shot down by ground fire on Monday. Another, a Sea Fury, was lost on Tuesday. This left Castro with an air force of four serviceable aircraft. We, on the other hand, when it was all over had a dozen or more serviceable B-26's, six F-51 fighters, and two jet fighters.

Now I know where the expression *C'est la guerre* came from.

Things began to shut down rapidly in the camp at Puerto Cabeza. Within forty-eight hours after the last shot had been fired on the beaches at the Bay of Pigs, a large delegation of Nicaraguan army officers appeared in camp and spent the better part of an afternoon in conference with the headquarters staff in the compound. General Samozá, the Nicaraguan President's brother, led the group. We could guess, of course, that the Nicaraguan government would now be in a highly nervous state of mind. The fact that the invasion had been staged out of Puerto Cabeza was no secret to anyone anymore—much less to Fidel Castro. A map, complete with "X" marks and arrows showing exact locations and routes of flight from Puerto Cabeza to the south coast of Cuba appeared in the April 21 edition of *Time*.

The day after the visit of the Nicaraguans we began flying patrols from daylight til dark up and down the coast of Nicaragua in B-26's. Our orders were to divert any aircraft attempting to penetrate the airspace around Puerto Cabeza. We were instructed to fire once across their bow, and if this did not produce the desired results, to shoot them down. The possibility of a Castro counter-attack was very much on everyone's mind. The Nicaraguan government was intent on getting us all out of the country as soon as possible—along with all the evidence that we had ever been there. (This did not extend to the B-26's which the Nicaraguan Air Force "inherited").

Flights began leaving Puerto Cabeza every day for Miami. Larry, Al, Frank, Reid, Vic

and Connie left almost immediately. The so-called "contract" crews were gone. Gil Hutchinson was busy burning papers in an incinerator in the compound. Before he left, Doc Barr drove out to a Catholic mission, somewhere deep in the interior and made a present of all his medical equipment to the nuns who ran the mission. He also presented the mission hospital in Puerto Cabeza with a large supply of Penicillin—which they were overjoyed to get although they wound up having to shoot most of it into some of our guys who, finding time hanging heavy on their hands, organized a foreign relations program of their own which they pursued in town every night.

At four o'clock in the afternoon of the third day following the collapse of the invasion, I was called from my tent to the compound to see Burt, who was now the ranking Company man in Camp. Burt said that I was to get a crew together for a flight to Homestead Air Force Base in Florida with a plane load of "mutineers". I learned for the first time of the prison stockade deep in the interior of Guatemala. It had been set up many months before to hold the wide assortment of dissentients who always appear in the ranks of any military organization. These included AWOL's, deserters, Castro agents who had infiltrated the Brigade ranks, ordinary criminals and some who were not so ordinary (there was one murderer), and a handful of men who had led a revolt of sorts against Company and Brigade authority back in the winter. I suppose it was this group that inspired Burt's use of the word "mutineers".

In all, there were 66 prisoners. They had been held for several days on a ship in the harbor at Puerto Cabeza. Burt's instructions were to fly them to Homestead Air Force Base outside Miami. He said everyone in the crew must be armed and that I was to tell the prisoners that anyone who so much as rattled the door from the cabin into the cockpit would be shot. I was not to hesitate to carry out this order Burt said, and could answer any questions later in Miami.

Gordon, Sandy and Ferd made up the crew. We all had forty-fives and Sandy still had one of the tommy-guns he had drawn earlier. The C-54 was ready on the line. So were the prisoners who were still on the trucks that had brought them from the ship. A Company security man was waiting for us with a pair of scales. He had the idea we would want to weigh the men as they went on board with their hand luggage. I explained that it would be unnecessary to weigh the men and that we were not worrying about over-grossing the airplane. I said that I did not want the men to carry anything on board with them, baggage, bundles, packages, or whatever. All this must be stowed in the cargo holds in the belly of the aircraft. I asked the Company security officer to have the men form in single file and go one at a time to the cargo hold where I stationed Sandy. After they disposed of any luggage they were carrying, they were to board the airplane and sit down. First, however, I wanted him and Gordon to shake each man down as he filed past and was checked off the list. The security officer said all the men had been shaken down before they got off the boat.

"Well, let's shake them down again," I said. "One more time won't hurt anything."

We found a cardboard carton. When the last man boarded the airplane the carton was almost full. We found knives, sharpened spoons, three or four wrenches and even a couple of guns. The security officer was somewhat chagrined to say the least. "Well, he said, 'they must not have shaken them down very good.'"

"No, and there's no telling what may be in those bundles and suitcases. They can't get at any of that stuff in flight, but I'll tell the people in Miami to go through it good."

I stationed Ferd inside the cargo door where the men came on board. I went forward and stood in the door to the cockpit. The prisoners came up the ladder and into the cabin one at a time. Ferd instructed each man to find a seat. I looked each man over carefully, hoping to find some sign that would tell me where trouble might be anticipated.

There was nothing. They all looked tough enough to eat a hole through the side of the airplane if they felt like it. Of course the months they had spent in the jungle stockade, and the more recent confinement on the ship at Puerto Cabeza had done nothing to improve their personal appearance. They were all sizes, shapes and colors. One man was well over six-four. He looked to be half Chinese and half Negro. He was hairless and he wore an oriental style black mustache that drooped at the ends. He looked like a giant-size, villainous Yul Brynner, and by all odds he was the most absolute personification of evil I have ever seen.

The cabin filled quickly. Almost a third of the men had to sit on the floor. When they were all in, Gordon climbed on board and went forward into the cockpit with Ferd. Sandy closed and locked the cargo doors at the rear, then he went forward past me into the cockpit banging the tommy-gun around noisily. I was still standing in the door facing the men in the cabin. I asked for someone who could speak English. A man sitting at my feet spoke up.

"Okay, stand up here and repeat exactly what I tell you. Make sure that everyone understands what I say."

"First tell the men that we're going to Miami. This will be a six hour flight. They are permitted to smoke after we are in the air. Use the tin cans that are furnished for ashtrays and butts."

I nodded to the interpreter, and he rattled off a rapid stream of Spanish. While he was talking I watched the prisoners and quickly divided them into three categories. Some of them were gazing out the window or staring at the floor. Others watched the interpreter as he spoke. A few never took their eyes off me. Among these few was the giant Chinese. I wondered if they were trying to make up their minds about anything.

"Now," I said, "tell them that I do not know who will meet them in Miami, where they will go, or what plans have been made for them. Tell them that I know nothing other

than that I have been instructed to fly them to Miami."

The interpreter rattled this off.

"The last thing is this. All the men must stay where they are throughout the flight. No one is permitted in the cockpit or forward of this door. If anyone opens, or attempts to open this door he will be shot."

There was a slight pause, then the interpreter translated. I couldn't see any change of expression on anyone's face. Fu Manchu didn't blink an eye—and he didn't take his eyes off me. "You're sure everybody understands—they got it okay?", I asked.

"Si, they got it."

The flight to Miami that night was uneventful. We flew north out of Puerto Cabeza to a point east of the Nicaragua—Honduras border. Then we took up a northwest heading across Swan Island, checked our position abeam Belize, steered by the Cozumel, Mexico, radio beacon to sneak through the Yucatan Channel and past the west tip of Cuba. Then we headed north again into the Gulf of Mexico to a dead-reckoned position due west of Fort Myers, Florida. When we turned east we began a descent to 150 feet. We flew across the Gulf of Mexico, crossed the west coast of Florida a few miles south of Fort Myers, and flew across the Everglades to Homestead Air Force Base at 150 feet. The reason for this was to avoid showing up on anyone's radar screen—which brings up some interesting possibilities that are not a part of this story.

Thirty miles out from Homestead Air Force Base, Gordon picked up the mike and called the tower. "Homestead tower, Lima one."

"Lima One, this is Homestead tower, go ahead."

"Lima one, thirty miles west for landing."

"Roger, Lima one, what's your altitude and point of departure?"

Gordon was stumped. Having been cleared into a SAC Base, we assumed the control tower operator would have the necessary instructions and our call sign. Gordon picked up the

mike. "Uh-wah, Homestead tower, I don't have that information."

This cracked me up. To give all due credit however, the Homestead tower operator fielded this one without too much strain. "Uh, roger, Lima one. Understand—uh, stand by one—"

In a few minutes he was back on the air. "Lima one cleared left turn in runway three-five, wind three-one-zero at eight knots, altimeter two-niner-niner-eight, call left base."

Before we rolled to a stop on the runway a jeep raced forward from under our wing and pulled up ahead of us on the runway. There was a "Follow Me" sign attached to the back end of the jeep, and four Air Police were inside with automatic weapons. The jeep guided us away from the hangars and the control tower. We came to a stop in a dark corner of the field. I switched off the taxi lights, cut the engines and opened the cockpit window beside me. Sandy went back and opened the door. I stuck my head out the window. Beams from a dozen or more flashlights were moving around on the ramp. I looked back along the length of the airplane. Two or three flashlights were climbing the ladder into the cabin. After a minute or two my eyes became accustomed to the darkness and I could make out forms moving around under the wing. Then I recognized Erick standing just below my cockpit window.

"Howdy, Erick."

"Is that you, Buck?"

"That's me."

"Well. I'm happy to see you again. Have your crew stand by there in the cockpit for a few minutes until we can get your passengers checked out and off the aircraft."

Erick hadn't changed.

We stayed in the cockpit for thirty minutes while the prisoners were unloading. On the ramp outside I saw a couple of familiar looking vans. The aircraft was apparently ringed by Air Police carrying automatic weapons. When the last of the prisoners was off we walked back through the cabin and

climbed stiffly down the ladder to the ramp. We all shook hands with Erick. On the horizon to the north the lights of Miami glowed against the sky. It had been a long time since we had seen the lights of a city.

"Hey, Erick, how about going into town for a couple of hours?" Gordon asked.

"I'm afraid you're as close to Miami as you're going to get for a while," Erick said. "We have some coffee for you and a gas truck is on the way. You'll have to take off as soon as you've been refueled. You should be clear of the coast and well out to sea before daylight."

"Erick, you're a doll," Gordon said.

Erick was right, though. We were indeed well out to sea at sunrise. In fact, it was only 9:30 in the morning when we lowered the gear and turned on final approach to the field at Puerto Cabeza. We never learned what happened to our 66 "mutineers". The last we saw of them was the two vans disappearing into the darkness at Homestead. Maybe they were just driven to the corner of Flagler Street and Biscayne Boulevard and unloaded onto the city streets of Miami.

There was no sign of life on the field when we landed, and no activity in camp. We were reduced to a skeleton crew in camp. Burt and a handful of Company administrative personnel were still in the compound. The Birmingham pilots remained. All the Cuban pilots were still in camp. Two nights later we flew them to Homestead Air Force Base. Somebody came and got the two remaining C-54's and we were left with one C-46. Ten days after the invasion the B-26 patrols were discontinued. The Nicaraguans were a lot more in evidence and a lot less friendly. Armed Nicaraguan soldiers patrolled the field and stood guard over the B-26's.

We managed to engineer one last fiasco before we all checked out and returned to Miami. The military commander of the district in which Puerto Cabeza is the principal town, was a Nicaraguan captain named Cardonas. Captain Cardonas had quarters at

the far end of the field. From time to time we were called on to perform small favors and to occasionally provide transportation for Captain Cardonas and other members of the Nicaraguan military establishment.

One morning shortly before our final departure from Puerto Cabeza, Ron flew Cardonas to Managua in the C-46. He was scheduled to go back and pick him up the next morning. That night someone had the happy thought that we should fly back to Managua right that minute, spend the night in the city, and pick up Cardonas for the return trip next morning. Ron, Joe, Burt and I piled into the C-46 about ten o'clock and took off. Ron, who had been to Managua a couple of times before, swore that he knew all the "ropes" and that we would have no difficulties. We all carried phoney papers and might have had considerable trouble explaining ourselves if the occasion arose.

We landed at Managua at 11:30 and taxied to the military side of the field. Ron managed to convey to the personnel on duty that we had been asked by Captain Carondas to come in that night so that we could make an early departure next morning. We found a taxi driver who spoke English and we kept him with us while we toured the night spots of the city. When everyone had run out of money in the small hours of the morning, we returned to the hotel. We instructed the cab driver, whom we had not paid, to meet us in the morning to take us back to the field. Our plan was to locate Captain Cardonas and put the bite on him for the hotel and cab bill. This all sounded great at 3 o'clock in the morning. Things weren't quite so rosy when we met for a subdued breakfast at 9:30. Ron called the field and couldn't locate Captain Cardonas. No one knew where he was and the language barrier prevented any conveyance of the nuances of our problem. The cab driver, with whom we had run up a sizeable tab, had spotted us in the lobby and was lurking in the entranceway to the hotel. Our biggest danger was that Captain Cardonas would go to the airport and, in our absence, find another ride back to Puerto Cabezas—leaving

us stranded with no contact in Managua and with our billfolds stuffed with bogus identification papers.

Ron made a couple of trips to the desk to get the switchboard operator to place calls to the airport. We were beginning to attract attention. The clerk at the desk kept looking at us suspiciously and turning to talk to the switchboard operator. We were beginning to have visions of languishing in a Nicaraguan jail for the rest of our lives when Ron came up with another one of his bright ideas.

All of us had been given a list of telephone numbers to call in the event of an emergency. There was one number for each of the countries in Central America. The kind of emergency contemplated, however, was not the kind we were facing at the moment. What had been contemplated was something like a forced landing in a remote area where high level efforts would be required to get us out.

Ron suddenly remembered the numbers. We all thought this would be the answer to our problem. Probably the number in each country was for some military headquarters, and, if nothing else, we could track down Captain Cardonas. Ron made another trip to the lobby desk. He spoke to the clerk and wrote out a number on a slip of paper which the clerk handed to the switchboard operator. Suddenly a big flap developed. Ron headed back toward us across the lobby leaving the clerk and the telephone operator babbling at each other and gesticulating wildly.

"Guess what?" Ron said.

"I'm afraid to," Joe said.

"Who do you think this is the number for?"

"President Somoza," I said sarcastically.

"Well, smart-ass, that's exactly right."

"Oh, come on Ron. Look, we've got to think of something. Did you call the number, or not?"

"I'm not kidding," Ron said. "This is the Nicaraguan White House number."

"You'd better be kidding," Joe said.

"For Christ sake," I said. "This is like running out of money at the Mayflower bar

and calling the White House to send President Kennedy down to bail you out. We may have to call the Embassy."

"And who will we say we are?" Joe asked.

"Here comes the Senor manager." Ron said.

The desk clerk was heading across the lobby. Cardonas was on the phone. Ron explained the problem, Cardonas talked to the clerk, and in two minutes we were on the way to the airport in our taxi. We explained to Cardonas, or I thought we did, that the taxi driver was holding a tab and we didn't have any money to pay him either. Cardonas walked over to the cab and screamed at the driver in Spanish for a few minutes. I didn't see him give the driver any money, but the taxi went rattling off at high speed back down the road toward town.

The last flight out of Puerto Cabeza for Miami departed on May 14. Bill flew the C-46. Burt rode co-pilot. Ron, and I mixed rum and cokes for everyone in the back end all the way to Miami.

On the flight to Miami we followed the usual course north through the Yucatan Channel into the Gulf of Mexico and then east to Florida. Without making any particular effort to keep track of our progress, a kind of sixth sense told all of us in the back end of the C-46 when we were approaching the point in our flight that brought us closest to the western tip of Cuba. Almost as if on signal, conversations and gin rummy games stopped. Everyone stationed himself at a window and we devoted the next forty-five minutes to a careful and continuous scanning of the skies. Except for a small registry number on the vertical stabilizer, all of our aircraft were unmarked. They carried no airline, military or other identification. On these flights to Miami we were sitting ducks if a Castro fighter came up to look us over and decided he knew who we were. This had happened on one occasion to Ernie on a return flight from Miami in a C-54. Ernie was flying at 9,000 feet above broken clouds when he spotted a single-engine fighter silhouetted against a towering cumulus. The fighter was climbing fast from the direction

where Cuba lay less than a hundred miles to the east. At the instant he spotted the fighter, Ernie chopped the throttles and dove fast into the cloud deck below him. He reversed direction and flew north for five minutes, then headed west for thirty minutes before resuming his original heading. He didn't see the fighter again.

Through the open door into the cockpit I could see Bill and Burt in continuous motion, swiveling their heads around in all directions, bending forward and sideways in order to see out and up into the sky around us. Bill looked back over his shoulder and caught my eye. He motioned me to come forward into the cockpit. Bill pointed to the radar screen just forward of his left knee. Painted in bright yellow, the western tip of Cuba projected into the circular screen from the ninety degree position. Bill pointed with his finger to the range mark which indicated that the tip of the island was eighty miles off our right wing. I stood behind the two pilots' seats and watched as the radar target gradually moved down and around the circumference and finally disappeared off the screen. Wade, Leo, Pete and Riley lay somewhere on that island over the horizon.

I have heard us described as soldiers-of-fortune, spies, unemployed National Guard reservists and "swashbuckling, duplicitous, highhanded adventurers." I can't think of a single one of our group who could answer to any of those descriptions.

I didn't know Wade Gray before we were hired to participate in the invasion, and I never got to know him well afterwards. When we arrived in Central America Wade was assigned to ground duties. His work was confined to the maintenance, repair and installation of radio equipment. Except for his fateful flight on Wednesday morning, he participated in no flight activities. During the few weeks we were in Florida I knew Wade as a man who was quiet, friendly and attentive to duty—which was to familiarize himself with the electronic equipment on our aircraft. Wade's most distinguishing features were an abundance of fine, wavy, grey hair and a

beautiful wife who looked like Elizabeth Taylor. He was a skilled aviation electronics technician, a field which offers far greater opportunities than there are trained people to take advantage of them. Wade would never have become involved in the Bay of Pigs affair where he lost his life unless he had been specifically asked—and under circumstances which made it clear that the request for his services came from his own government.

Pete Ray was the youngest and least experienced of our group, and he probably shouldn't have been along. Pete got his flying training in Air Force flying schools and he served briefly with the Air Guard. When I first met him, Pete was in process of transferring his military affiliations to the U.S. Army where he had a promising career ahead of him as an Army pilot. If I were to attempt a capsule characterization of Pete, I would say he exemplified all that is suggested in that overworked cliché, "family man." He was devoted to his wife, Margaret, and their two children, and they spent all of his free time together. I didn't know Pete well enough to say what motivated him to accept a part in our show. I did know him well enough to say that he was neither swashbuckling nor adventurous.

Riley Shamburger was big and beefy, and under the beef was muscle. He was gregarious, fun-loving and hell-raising. But Riley was no swaggering, noisy bravo. As a test pilot he was a highly skilled technician. As a military pilot he was a squadron commander who inspired the highest degree of confidence, loyalty and affection among his men—pilots and ground crews alike. He was one of those rare leaders who are genuinely concerned for the welfare and careers of their subordinates, and they know it. Anyone I ever knew who served with Riley would have gone anywhere and done anything he asked with complete confidence—even, to use another cliché, to Hell. Riley was not actually a member of our group. Long before any of us were contacted, or knew anything about the plans for an invasion at the Bay of Pigs, Riley was already deep in the planning of the operation at a Washington level. Where we were hired

specifically to fly combat missions, Riley, by the very nature and extent of his involvement, and his close connections with the plans and people, would be specifically *prohibited* from flying. Riley was far too big a fish to risk having him hooked on one of Castro's lines. When in desperation Riley, Colonel Hal McGee, Vic and Connie were allowed to fly combat missions at the Bay of Pigs, I imagine it was with the full knowledge that capture and imprisonment were not among their alternatives.

Leo Baker and I worked together often. He was the flight engineer on many of the long flights out over the Pacific and across the mountains and jungles between Retalhuleu and Puerto Cabeza. We slept in adjoining canvass cots in the tent where we lived alongside the runway at Puerto Cabeza. Perhaps this is why I got to know Leo better than many of the others. I got to know him well enough to know that he was not many of the things he pretended to be.

The man Leo pretended to be would not have lost his life at the Bay of Pigs. The man Leo pretended to be wouldn't have been within a thousand miles of the Bay of Pigs in the first place.

Leo was a short, dark, wiry little man in his mid-thirties. He had jet-black hair, an olive complexion and sardonic dark brown eyes that mirrored a perpetual insolence. He was a difficult person to know, and, for some, harder to like. With a couple of drinks under his belt he often became argumentative and combative. He talked in a loud voice and his vocabulary consisted almost entirely of four-letter words which he used fluently, regardless of the company he was in. He got into fist fights with friends whom he goaded beyond endurance with his militant, know-it-all attitude, and with strangers who were insulted by his language and behavior.

On the surface Leo was a type easily recognizable by anyone who has spent any time in military service. There was one like him in every outfit. As far as Leo was concerned, authority was his only real enemy. Discipline was designed purely and simply to shackle

personal freedom. Rank reflected nothing more than discrimination. Leo was outspoken in his contempt for any expression of patriotism or love of country. Selflessness was a pose. Any human emotion that involved even a hint of tenderness or compassion became an immediate target for his scorn. Leo used his cynicism as a lance to puncture all pretension—and to Leo practically everything and everyone were slightly phoney, or so he would have had you believe.

I began to learn the truth about Leo long before he was shot down at the Bay of Pigs on Wednesday morning. Until he remarried, shortly before he enlisted in our operation in Central America, Leo had lived alone with a 12-year-old daughter in Birmingham. Every morning before she went to school she made lunches for the two of them. She "kept house" for Leo with the help of a maid. As often as he allowed her to, she cooked dinner for Leo at night. Unless he was flying, they went to mass together every Sunday morning. I never asked Leo what personal family circumstances produced this situation. I only knew that he had been divorced from his first wife. No doubt other arrangements were possible that would have imposed far fewer restrictions on Leo's personal activities. As it was, however, Leo never allowed anything to interfere with his duties and responsibilities as a father. The little girl obviously adored him and tried to mother him. Leo indulged her and returned her love. From my long talks with Leo at night over the Pacific and in the tent by the runway at Puerto Cabeza, it was obvious that Leo intended that nothing would ever separate them.

Once before, while we were still in Fort Lauderdale, Leo had revealed a facet of his character entirely inconsistent with the image he tried to project. On occasion, Mac asked the flight engineers on our training flights to stay behind after we landed to perform needed maintenance on the aircraft. Leo always griped about this and was loud in his contempt for the professional abilities of the pilots who, according to Leo, by their mishandling of the aircraft were responsible for all malfunctions and break-downs. One afternoon (on a day I

had not been scheduled to fly) I returned to the apartment to be met by the news that Leo had been fired and was being sent back to Birmingham. Apparently he had been too loud and too vehement in his protests when Mac asked him to stay behind and work on the aircraft. Later that afternoon I went across the street to say goodbye to Leo. He was dressed in shorts and T-shirt, drinking beer at the kitchen table, and giving no evidence of an imminent departure.

"I heard a rumor that you might be going back to Birmingham, Leo."

"You've been listening to a lot of goddamn gossip, Buck," Leo said.

I didn't pursue the subject. Later Erick told us that Leo had called him on the phone, come down to Erick's apartment and begged to be allowed to stay. At one point, according to Erick, Leo practically got down on his knees and offered to give up all his salary and work for nothing if Erick would let him go on to Central America with us.

The real truth about Leo, as I eventually learned, was that all his toughness and cynicism were not really weapons. They were a shield. Down inside, that hardboiled egg was soft as putty.

When Leo and Pete were hit on Wednesday morning they crashed on the air strip at the

Central Australia sugar mill. From stories told by civilians who lived on the plantation, it is evident that Pete was badly injured in the crash and couldn't get out of the plane. Leo, who was not seriously injured, jumped out of the plane with his 45 automatic in his hand and fought a brief but fierce battle with Castro militia before he was killed. Later, photographs found their way back into the United States showing both Pete and Leo lying on the ground with bullet holes in their heads.

When I left the cockpit and went back into the cabin I took a last look out the window, back over the sea toward where Cuba lay just beyond the horizon. "Wherever you are now, you little bastard," I said to myself, "you're lying on your shield, not behind it."

"If there's a law against hauling drunks in an airplane, I'll get life," Bill said when we landed in Miami. For his benefit and Burt's we continued the party at the Green Mansions Motel for another six hours.

Next day we were de-briefed by Company personnel. I caught a plane out of Miami late that night. On the way home from the airport in Birmingham I passed a Pizza shack Leo had owned and operated on the side. The Pizza shack was dark and the windows were boarded up.

We shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us.

—Patrick Henry, 1775

TRINIDAD

Trinidad is a city with a population of 20,000 located on the south coast of Cuba. It is one hundred miles east of the Bay of Pigs, and about one third of the distance from the western-most end of the island to the eastern tip. Trinidad has a good harbor and an airfield. The invasion of Cuba as it was originally planned by the CIA and the Pentagon during the Eisenhower administration was to have been launched at Trinidad. However, the CIA was required by the White House to abandon these plans only a few weeks before the invasion was actually launched on April 15, 1961. Otherwise no one would ever have heard of the Bay of Pigs.

At the western tip of Cuba a low range of mountains borders the narrow northern coastal plain. The rugged Sierra Maestra rises to elevations of more than 6,000 feet along the extreme southeastern coastline. In between, most of Cuba is rolling plain, like Iowa.

From a tactical military point of view, one of Trinidad's most distinguishing features is the adjacent terrain. To the east and northeast of Trinidad a small range of mountains rises to a height of 3,000 feet. To the west and northwest another range rises to a height of 4,000 feet. These are the Escambrays. The railroad serving Trinidad runs north and

south through the valley between these two ranges. This valley is approximately 12 miles wide. If these heights were occupied by military forces (and they *were* occupied by guerilla forces), they would command this valley. If you used Trinidad as the center, and transcribed a half circle around it, with a 20-mile radius, then beginning 20 miles up the coast to the west, and ending 20 miles down the coast to the east, the Escambray Mountains command all the terrain included inside the circumference of this half-circle. No doubt all this geography recommended itself highly to the planners of the invasion.

Additional tactical advantages of Trinidad which may have been recognized by the military, included its remoteness from heavy concentrations of Castro military forces. A landing at Trinidad would have immediately established a perimeter with flanks solidly anchored in the high ground where guerilla forces were already operating. There was a harbor and an airfield through which to support the beachhead. An invasion at Trinidad would also have resulted in the immediate capitulation to the invaders of a sizeable city and its civilian population; and it would have provided a suitable base for the relocation

of the government in exile and its reconstitution as a revolutionary government in the homeland.

The ultimate success of an invasion at Trinidad depended on unchallenged supremacy in the air. With this accomplished by initial surprise attacks against Castro's air bases and his handful of operational aircraft, the exile air forces would have been completely free to range up and down the length and breadth of Cuba destroying power and communications facilities, transportation facilities, and concentrations of military forces and armored equipment. From the beginning the operation was intended to have been primarily an air operation. It was planned as an overwhelming air operation designed to demoralize the Castro government, spread havoc and destruction from one end of the island to the other, and through the overwhelming evidence of its success, inspire massive defections from the armed forces. No one ever had the idea that 1,400 infantry troops could defeat Castro's army of 200,000 in hand-to-hand combat.

In essence, this is what had been planned by the CIA and the Pentagon. The exile brigade had the forces and the aircraft to carry out this plan with a much better than even chance for success.

When President Kennedy assumed office in January, 1961, he inherited the Trinidad plan for the invasion of Cuba from the Eisenhower administration. It is unlikely that President Kennedy viewed with any great enthusiasm a project which committed him in his first months to a course of action so out of harmony with the tone he had set for his administration during his campaign and in the first few weeks he was in office. It is a matter of fact this project inspired considerable opposition in the ranks of his close circle of personal advisors, chief among whom was his brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy.

The problem President Kennedy faced, however, was not one he could solve by simply deciding to proceed according to plan, or

to cancel the operation entirely. Had it been this simple, no doubt President Kennedy would have liked nothing better than to cancel the entire undertaking the moment it was presented to him. But there were other considerations which prevented any such easy way out—what to do with the Cuban forces already training in Guatemala?

Haynes Johnson in his book, *The Bay of Pigs*, described an incident which he says occurred in Guatemala in March, 1961. This is a story about the chief American advisor's proposal to the Cubans that they arrest the Americans and put them under guard if the new administration in Washington decided to pull the rug out from under the exile brigade. While this is a preposterous story, it is not to say that the Cubans in Guatemala had not considered the possibility that a new administration in Washington would decide to abandon the invasion plan. According to one of the exiles, Douglas Lethbridge, with whom I discussed this matter, some brigade leaders in Guatemala *did* have a contingency plan by which they hoped to salvage their invasion plans if Washington canceled out at the last minute. This plan did not, however, include perfidious actions by ranking American officers in the field.

Douglas Lethbridge was born in Canada. While he was still an infant he moved with his parents to Cuba where he grew up as a Cuban. He served briefly in the Royal Canadian Air Force, and was an early recruit in Brigade 2506. Lethbridge went ashore at the Bay of Pigs in charge of a group that was to have established air base facilities on the beachhead. He was captured, imprisoned for two years, and released with the other members of the brigade in 1963.

According to Lethbridge, leaders in the Cuban exile forces in Guatemala had worked on a plan to be put into effect if they were abandoned by the new administration in Washington. Lethbridge says that contacts had been made with dissidents in the Guatemalan armed forces and that the Cubans in Guatemala planned to participate in a *coup* to

set up a new government in Guatemala. The new government would take over where Washington had left off, and continue to back the Cubans in their invasion plans.

All this may or may not be true, but what is certain is that as the weeks rolled by and as the pressures generated by the Cubans' continued presence in Guatemala piled higher and higher on President Ydigoras' nervous shoulders, so too did his demands that Washington get the Cubans out of Guatemala.

As late as March 11, 1961, President Kennedy had not reached a final decision, although the staging base at Puerto Cabeza had been set up and invasion plans were proceeding.

Arthur Schlesinger, who sat in on meetings where plans and decisions for the invasion were discussed, describes the situation in Washington at the time like this:

"The determination to keep the scheme alive sprang in part, I believe, from the embarrassment of calling it off. As (Alan) Dulles said at the meeting on March 11, 'Don't forget that we have a disposal problem. If we have to take these men out of Guatemala, we will have to transfer them to the United States and we can't have them wandering around the country telling everyone what they have been doing'. What could one do with this 'asset' if not send it on to Cuba? If transfer to the United States was out, demobilization on the spot would create even greater difficulties. The Cubans themselves were determined to go back to their homeland, and they might well forcibly resist efforts to take away their arms and equipment. Instead of turning the Cubans loose, . . . we must find some means for putting them back into Cuba on their own."

Schlesinger quotes President Kennedy as saying at this time, "If we have to get rid of these men, it is much better to dump them in Cuba than in the United States, especially if that is where they want to go."

Schlesinger continues to describe the President's indecision but he manages to transfer all of the onus to the CIA. "Having created the brigade as an option," Schlesinger says,

"the CIA now presented its use against Cuba as a necessity. Kennedy, confronted with these arguments, tentatively agreed that the simplest thing, after all, might be to let the Cubans go where they wanted to go—to Cuba. Then he tried to turn the meeting toward a consideration of how this could be done with the least possible political risk."

The CIA, of course, did not create the brigade as an "option". The CIA created the brigade on orders of the President of the United States, who was Dwight Eisenhower at the time. The "options" involved were all strictly President Kennedy's.

Schlesinger says that as late as mid-March President Kennedy had only "tentatively agreed" to go ahead with the invasion plans. The President's ultimate decision to go ahead with the invasion seems to have come not from a desire to implement a policy decision concerning the Castro regime, but, rather, from his inability to solve the problem of the Cubans in Guatemala. When he couldn't find a way out of his dilemma, he addressed himself reluctantly to the invasion plans and decided that they were too "spectacular". As Schlesinger recalls, he did not want a big amphibious landing, at Trinidad. He wanted a "quiet" landing, "preferably at night."

It was Dean Rusk's idea, according to Schlesinger, that some one else should make the final decision and do so in the President's absence—"someone who could be sacrificed if things went wrong."

President Kennedy seems to have been determined to conceal the role of the United States government in this affair, and apparently he became completely hung up on the idea that he could transfer the invasion from Trinidad to the Bay of Pigs, have the troops land before daylight, cut down on the number of aircraft used in the raids, cut down on the number of raids scheduled, and thus, somehow, prevent the role of the United States from "surfacing". The role of the United States had surfaced a long time prior to April 15, 1961.

By overruling the operation set up by the CIA and the Pentagon, and by requiring them

TRINIDAD

to develop new plans, almost overnight, for landings at the Bay of Pigs, the President cut the chances for success to an irreducible minimum. The Bay of Pigs was a poor harbor; the approaches to the beach were studded with corral formations; the terrain was an impenetrable swamp which eliminated any possibility of setting up an adequate perimeter defense—and *there was no escape if things went wrong*. The President also cut down the size of the air strike forces used on the initial raid against Castro's air bases. Even so, the Saturday strike reduced Castro's air force to six operationally serviceable aircraft. Then, still worried about concealing the U.S. government's hand in the affair, the President canceled a strike on Sunday morning, and another strike on Monday morning on grounds that there was no way these strikes could appear to be coming from the beaches.

What this means is that following the initial strike on Saturday morning, Secretary of State Dean Rusk began to get into the act. It seems that Secretary Rusk was dead set against any further strikes against Cuba unless they could be made to appear to come

from the beachhead and not from Nicaragua. He did not suggest any practical way to satisfy this requirement. In his opinion the planes would appear to be U.S. planes in the eyes of the United Nations. Therefore, Rusk said, a second strike would put the United States in an untenable position internationally. Secretary Rusk discussed the matter with McGeorge Bundy who agreed with him. Then they called the President at Glen Ora, Virginia, and conveyed their ideas to him. The President agreed with Rusk and Bundy and canceled the air support over the beachhead on Monday morning, thus transferring to Castro in the bat of an eye the freedom of the skies and the air supremacy on which victory for the exile forces hinged.

The Bay of Pigs is now a part of history, and for the record this is the way it all came about—as an absolute tragedy of errors, indecision and timidity with all kinds of cooks stirring away at the pot and trying to cover up the mess when it was all over.

Trying to cover up a mess like the Bay of Pigs is like trying to cover up a platter full of warm jello with one hand.

POST MORTEM

In a long reign as champion of the poor, and oppressed, and enslaved people all over the world, the United States suffered a major defeat at the Bay of Pigs. What made the taste of this defeat more bitter was that it came at the hands of the bearded proprietor of a small piece of real estate, obviously mortgaged to the Soviet Union, lying only ninety miles off our own shores. Naturally public interest focused immediately on the causes for the disaster and on speculation concerning who was to blame. It was the kind of thing card-carrying extremists could get their teeth into, and almost overnight the Bay of Pigs became a *cause celebre* of both ends of the political spectrum. Accusations ranged all the way from charges that "the Kennedys" and the "communists in the State Department" had deliberately sabotaged the invasion on orders from the Kremlin, to equally bizarre claims that the Pope had ordered President Kennedy to insure a Castro victory on the grounds that Cuba is a primarily Catholic nation. Unfortunately, many of the seeds sown by the lunatic fringe were able to take root and to grow through the refusal of the administration to permit an objective inquiry and a full report on the affair, letting the chips fall wherever they may have. Perhaps it is utterly naive to even suggest such a course of action. On

the other hand most of us cannot avoid the consequences of our actions—particularly our failures, and it is with growing disenchantment that the American people today view a marked trend by public officials to distort, to conceal and to deceive whenever it is expedient or whenever it seems necessary in order for them to escape the consequences of their own actions.

The only official investigation and report on the Bay of Pigs invasion was produced by the committee appointed by President Kennedy himself. Whatever this committee may have learned, only the committee, President Kennedy and a handful of his advisors know. The committee's report was never made public. In reply to some questions by me on this subject, General Maxwell Taylor, who was chairman of the committee, said:

"I am afraid that I could not be of real assistance to you in providing qualified answers. While I worked very intensively on the broad aspects of this affair in 1961, I have forgotten many of the details which were available to our committee. I would only say that I felt at the time that the committee had access to all the facts necessary to allow us to form a qualified judgement as to the major causes of the failure of this undertaking."

General Taylor's committee may, or may not have had access to all the facts—presumably it did. The point is, why were these findings put under lock and key? Most people would agree that national security demands some measure of control over the dissemination of information concerning the activities of our government in its relations with foreign governments. Is it not fair to assume, however, that such controls as may be necessary in this area are not designed primarily to keep people in the dark, but, rather, to withhold from hostile hands knowledge of the ways and means employed by our government in the pursuit of its world goals and in the implementation of its foreign policies?

The Bay of Pigs is a part of history. Right or wrong the United States government sponsored an effort to overthrow a hostile government hard by our own shores. Today the entire world knows this. The whole world also knows that the United States was defeated in this effort. Is it not, possibly, in the interest of their *own* security that the people of this nation should know why, and how?

We emerged from the Cuban missile crisis in October, 1962, with a whole skin, but for a short while the world was close to nuclear war. How closely can this narrow escape be tied to our failure at the Bay of Pigs in 1961? How much loss of world support for our efforts in Vietnam have we suffered, and how many Americans will lose their lives there, because the power and the prestige of the United States were buried in the sand at the Bay of Pigs?

The answers today, like the questions, would have to be pure rhetoric. But how can people worry about answers when they don't even know what questions to ask?

At infrequent intervals in the first two years following the Bay of Pigs Attorney General Robert Kennedy and other high ranking government officials were prodded, or allowed themselves to be led, out into the open with public statements. Inevitably they soared skyward, hoist by their own petards.

In the main, what the public has been able to learn about the Bay of Pigs has come from two principal sources: 1. Published accounts by independent reporters who have conducted their own research and unearthed their own sources of information, and 2. Published accounts by intimate personal advisors to President Kennedy like Theodore Sorrenson and Arthur Schlesinger who are able to quote the President directly and, in Schlesinger's case, actually sat in and participated at meetings where policies and decisions were made. Their testimony is difficult to challenge.

Whether they were intimates of the President, or whether they had access to high (but always unidentified) government sources, these "authorized" versions of this historical event have one thing in common. Whether knowingly and deliberately or not, they all shift the responsibility for the failure to the shoulders of the CIA. In so doing they contribute substantially to a loss of confidence in an agency whose responsibilities and activities are vital to the security of the nation. And from all of these "authoritative" accounts there emerges the clear picture of efforts by administration leaders to explain the failure, not in terms of events as they actually occurred, but by weaving a whole fabric of dramatic and detailed, but largely fictitious, events.

David Wise and Thomas B. Ross obviously *did* have access to persons at high levels in the government who could speak with authority on the Bay of Pigs. But their book, *The Invisible Government*—a best seller, a Book of the Month Club selection, read by tens of thousands—recarpenters events at the Bay of Pigs so thoroughly as to sometimes be almost unrecognizable by anyone who was there.

During the course of his research for *The Invisible Government* David Wise came to Birmingham to interview me. He had already read two stories I had written for *Chicago's American*. In our conversation I repeated what I had said publicly in the two newspaper stories. Mr. Wise was interested in getting the names of men who had participated in the

operation. At no time have I ever revealed the names of any of the men who were engaged in this undertaking (other than my own and those of four men who died on Wednesday morning) for the obvious reason that some of them may still be engaged in activities which could be compromised if they should be identified with the Bay of Pigs. I explained this to Mr. Wise. Even so, Wise put a list of names on the table between us and asked me if I could verify the participation of any of the men on the list. There were a couple of names of Birmingham men who had not had anything to do with the operation. The others were names of men who very definitely had been in Guatemala and Nicaragua, including Larry, Al and Frank. What was even more interesting, Wise had the last names of these men. I had only known them by their first names. I learned later that the names Wise had were their "phoneys". I'm sure Wise didn't get this information from the individuals themselves, which strongly suggests that he really *did* have access to files at unbelievably high and top secret levels.

David Wise is a native New Yorker and a graduate of Columbia University. He joined the New York Herald Tribune in 1951 and moved to the Washington Bureau in 1958. After the 1960 presidential election, he was named the newspaper's White House correspondent. He became chief of his newspaper's Washington Bureau in November, 1963.

Thomas B. Ross is a graduate of Yale College. He served as a junior officer in the Navy during the Korean War. He subsequently worked for the International News Service and United Press International. In 1958 he became a member of the Washington Bureau of the Chicago Sun-Times.

The Invisible Government account of the Bay of Pigs invasion consists of four chapters in an overall story of U.S. intelligence and espionage. On the book's dust jacket the publishers (Random House) say:

This startling and disturbing book is the first full authentic account of America's in-

telligence and espionage apparatus—an Invisible Government with the CIA at its center, that conducts the clandestine policies of the United States in the Cold War—The Invisible Government is made up of many Agencies and people. . .but largest and most important of all is the Central Intelligence Agency. . .Four important chapters concentrate on the Bay of Pigs: disclosing the CIA's intricate but doomed plan for the operation and how the cover story failed; what was behind the controversy over the question of air cover for the invasion. . .

The Invisible Government's analysis of the Bay of Pigs goes into considerable detail. The authors attribute the failure of the invasion primarily to decisions which became necessary when it began to look as if a certain cover story might be penetrated. This was the story involving the Cuban pilot, Zuniga, who flew a B-26, shot full of holes at Puerto Cabeza, to Miami on Saturday morning, April 15, and landed there with one prop feathered. Zuniga's story was that he and other Castro pilots had revolted against the Castro government and had proceeded to attack various air fields in Cuba that morning. These attacks, of course, had been accomplished by the first mission from Puerto Cabeza.

Zuniga's story was intended to establish the basic nature of the fight which was starting in Cuba that morning as a Cuban-organized revolt against Castro. Within forty-eight hours, if all went according to plan, the invasion forces would land, establish a beachhead, and proceed with the help of guerillas already operating inside Cuba to overthrow the Castro government.

The fact that this cover story was paper thin is beside the point. It is only in retrospect that its "thinness" has any significance, and at that, only in the context of what *did* happen, not what was *intended* to happen. After all, Castro himself is bound to have known that none of his own pilots made the Saturday morning attacks against his air fields. But Castro was supposed to have been over-

thrown—fast. The invasion was intended to succeed, not fail. If it *had* succeeded prefabricated stories sufficiently smooth for world opinion to swallow without choking would have to be hammered together. The great embarrassment of our government resulted not so much from uncovered "cover stories," but from the fact that the operation failed before it ever really got off the ground, and, in failing, left Castro in full power, and in full voice, to trumpet his unanswerable charges of U.S. aggression to the rest of the world.

For its part, the U.S. government was left to explain as best it could to the American people what it had been doing down in the Carribean and what had gone wrong. If *The Invisible Government* can be considered a "voice" for such official explanations, then what we are asked to believe is that the Cuban invasion forces were simply defeated by certain basic weaknesses in the planning and execution of a military operation which was more-or-less doomed to start with, and which began and ended when the invasion forces went ashore and discovered that they were up against a too-powerful adversary and overwhelming odds.

The authors of *The Invisible Government* focus on precisely this theme in their reconstruction of events at the Bay of Pigs. The truth is, however that much of their story, with all of its specific detail and drama is largely the product of someone's (not theirs) imagination. Considering the high official levels at which the authors say they gathered their information, those of us who were actually involved at the Bay of Pigs are left, per force, to speculate on the identities and the motives of these sources.

When *The Invisible Government* was published, I called David Wise in Washington and asked him how he reconciled what I had told him in Birmingham with the account he gave in his book. Wise said, concerning the vital issue of air cover, that I was the only person he talked to who said there had been no air support for the invasion force on Monday morning when the Brigade went ashore.

He told me that considering who, and where, his sources were, he had no choice but to accept their account, rather than mine.

Beginning with the first air mission on Saturday morning, April 15, Wise and Ross say:

Despite the heavy air losses, the trouble with Zuniga's cover story and the United Nations debate, Richard Bissell (in charge for the CIA) was encouraged by the partial success of the April 15 raid. . . But political and foreign policy considerations began to outweigh the tactical plan. . . The cover story (Zuniga's) crumbled as Sunday wore on. United States participation was surfacing rapidly. The CIA plan hinged on the assumption that Zuniga's cover story would hold for at least forty-eight hours. In that event, the second air strike would either seem like the work of the rebelling Castro pilots, or would be overlooked in the general confusion.

In part, this might seem to be a fair analysis. If the invasion had succeeded the cover story would have become largely unimportant. However, Wise and Ross refer to the necessity for the cover story to hold up for forty-eight hours, that is until Monday, April 17, in time for the "second" strike to be launched. The fact is, the second strike, logically enough, was not planned for Monday morning, but for Sunday morning. It was a vital part of the plan and was to have been launched against a large concentration of Castro's armoured equipment. This second strike was cancelled, as was the third strike on Monday morning.

Robert Kennedy, while he was still Attorney General, referred to the Monday mission as the planned "second" mission. In his interview with U.S. News and World Report he said: "There was supposed to be another attack on the airports on Monday morning. . . and in fact it took place later that day." It did not, but perhaps Mr. Kennedy was unaware of this at the time.

Wise and Ross continue:
Now the situation had changed radically.

to proceed with the strike against the bases. Instead, they were to fly to the beaches to try to provide air cover for the landings.

I don't know what Mr. Bissell was doing in Washington during the pre-dawn hours on Monday, April 17, but the invasion forces were going ashore at the Bay of Pigs, and back at the base in Puerto Cabeza there were no pilots sitting in B-26's lined up on the runway.

At Happy Valley the disgruntled pilots climbed down from their cockpits. New briefings were held in the wooden operations building. New plans had to be drawn up on the spot because of the changed nature of the mission. . . It took a B-26 two hours and fifty minutes to fly from Happy Valley to the Bay of Pigs. The bombers had enough fuel to stay over the beaches for two hours if need be and still make it back to base. So it was decided that the bombers would fly over the beaches in pairs, every half hour. A total of eleven B-26's was sent over the beaches in relays. The first of them took off before daylight. As exile Brigard 2506 was moving ashore, Castro received word of the invasion. He ordered his T-33 jets and Sea Furies to take off before dawn for the Bay of Pigs. Joaquin Varela, a slight, twenty-eight-year-old former Cuban Air Force pilot, led the relays of B-26's over the beaches. With Castro's air force still in action, the bombers were flying straight to disaster. Eight exile pilots died that April morning. . . Still the B-26's kept coming. Demetrio Perez, riding the co-pilot seat of one of the bombers, looked at his watch as he crossed the south coast of Cuba en route to the Bay of Pigs. The twenty-five-year-old co-pilot noticed it was 11:56 A.M. He and the pilot, thirty-four-year-old Raul Vianello, were only two minutes behind schedule. . . At 2:15 P.M. its ammunition gone and fuel running low, the bomber turned for home. Just as Vianello attempted to climb into a bank of clouds for cover, a T-33 caught the bomber

All had hinged on the Zuniga story. With that story fast unravelling at the edges, could the President permit another B-26 strike on Monday morning and still convince the world that somehow a new covey of Castro pilots had defected from the Cuban Air Force? The President decided he could not. . . Alarmed by the President's eleventh hour decision, Bissell and General Charles P. Cabell, the CIA's deputy director, hurried to the State Department to appeal to Secretary of State Dean Rusk. . . Bissell returned to his office from the State Department, and about 11:00 p.m. he flashed the word to Happy Valley (Puerto Cabeza) that the B-26's were not to strike at Castro's air bases. Messages flowed back and forth between Nicaragua and Washington, and as it was finally resolved, the bombers were only to try to fly support missions over the beaches. At Happy Valley the change in orders caused dismay and confusion.

What this says is that the President decided that world opinion would not buy another strike at Castro's air bases on Monday, but it would buy air support for the 1,200 troops who would land at the Bay of Pigs on Monday morning—and they didn't get that.

At Puerto Cabeza, Nicaragua, at 1:15 A.M. on Monday, April 17, six B-26 bombers were lined up on the runway, ready to carry out the second strike against Castro's air bases. . . The planes were set to take off from Happy Valley at 1:40 A.M. They would strike just before dawn, finishing the destruction of Castro's air force that had begun with the first strike two days before. . . The men in the B-26's had not yet learned of Richard Bissell's message from Washington cancelling the air strike on orders from the President. But when 1:40 A.M. came and went with no clearance to take off, they realized something had gone wrong. . . At 1:55 A.M. the Cuban pilots were told their mission had been cancelled on orders from Washington. They were not

BAY OF PIGS

with a storm of bullets. The left engine was knocked out and smoke began to pour into the cockpit.

This is a highly imaginative and dramatic account of something that never took place. Whoever told Wise and Ross this story had to imagine a B-26 stooging around over the combat zone for two hours and twenty minutes. The B-26's used by the Cuban pilots did not carry enough gas in the first place, and if they had, the pilots would have used all their ammunition in less than twenty minutes—which would mean they spent a couple of hours just joy riding around over the swamps.

Eleven B-26's had flown from Happy Valley on this Monday, April 17. They were never told why their mission had been changed at the last moment from an air strike against Castro bases to air support over the beaches. They obeyed their orders, eight men died. Six planes were lost. Five planes returned to Happy Valley. Their valiant effort at such a high cost had not really been very effective over the beaches. "The Monday air cover", as an CIA official later conceded, "was murderous."

This is a detailed description of day-long air support for the Cuban invasion force. Certainly this is the one day, above all others the ground forces would have needed such support. And it must be assumed from this account that the authors' informants wanted them to believe that an all-out effort was made to give them this support. The authors even quote one "CIA official" directly on the matter of Monday's "air cover." The facts are quite different. The invading ground forces got no air support at all during the first critical hours on the beach. No aircraft were shot down on Monday. Only two B-26's had left the ramp at Puerto Cabeza since Saturday morning. They were flown by Vic and Connie Monday afternoon.

The start of Tuesday, April 18, found the exile brigade strung out along three beach-

heads on Cuba's southern shore. . . The exile air force was still in action, despite the long odds against it. A thunderstorm swelled the little river behind the airstrip at Happy Valley on Tuesday afternoon, and sent the scorpions and snakes scuttling for cover. Despite the storm, six B-26's took off at 2 P.M. Their target was a large Castro armoured column moving toward the shrinking beachhead at Giron. . . Despite the presidential pledge that no Americans would participate in the fighting. . . two bombers were flown by American CIA pilots.

Six bombers did not take off on Tuesday afternoon. Only two took off. They were flown by Vic and Connie who did not reach their targets because of weather. Early Tuesday morning, however, the second mission flown by the Cuban exiles was launched. This was the first and only mission launched since Saturday morning (excluding the flight by Vic and Connie on Monday afternoon)—a period of seventy-two hours—during which time Castro had ample opportunity to disperse his five remaining aircraft, his armour, and his troops to meet an invasion force which was entirely unsupported from the air during the first critical hours on the beach.

The same day, April 18, the exile air force received four P-51 Mustangs from the Nicaraguan government. The trouble was, the Cuban pilots had not been trained to fly them. The Mustangs went unused.

The trouble was, the airfield at Giron was overrun before the Mustangs could be put into action.

Wise and Ross have this version of the controversy over the use of the Navy jets from the Carrier Essex.

The President authorized the unmarked Navy jets from the Carrier Essex to fly over the Bay of Pigs for one hour just before dawn (on Wednesday). Their mission was to be restricted. . . The Navy jets were not to strafe or to initiate any firing. Under the

President's authorization, however, they could fire back if fired upon. . . Somewhere along the line there was a fatal mix up between the CIA and the Navy. In secret post-mortems over the Bay of Pigs, it was officially concluded that the bombers had arrived after the jets had already come and gone, after the clock had run out on the one hour of air support.

Hal McGee and Riley Shamburger were told they would have jet support. Considerable stress has been laid on the alleged inability of the B-26's to cope with the T-33's and the Sea Furies which survived the Saturday morning attack on Castro air fields. From this an inference has been drawn, widely accepted, and repeated by Wise and Ross, that the only possible salvation for the invasion at the Bay of Pigs lay in overt action by the United States government—that is, in a large commitment of U.S. carrier based jet fighters. The authors' sources failed to supply them with one important fact. Joe Harbert and Ron Smith, two "instructors", were sitting in two T-33 jets in Florida all the time, ready to go. The question of Navy jets having to be committed to save the day would seem to be more-or-less academic, even though they were there, and arrived at their appointed time along with the B-26's. If Wise and Ross had dug a little deeper, they would have learned that military and air activities are never conducted according to local time zones; always "Zulu" time—which is Greenwich mean meridian time.

It was 1:00 A.M. when the meeting broke up at the White House. . . At Happy Valley a 1:00 A.M. meeting was also in progress. . . All realized that the situation was grim and that something had to be done. The Cuban pilots were exhausted; (they had flown two missions; one Saturday, one on Tuesday—Authors note); ten were dead. The American advisors agreed to fly night missions starting that night, to relieve the weary Cubans. . . Five B-26's took off during the night. Shamburger and a fellow American, Wade Carroll Gray, flew in one B-26. Two more Americans, Thomas Willard Ray and

POST MORTEM

Leo Francis Baker, flew in another. Three other Americans flew. The fifth B-26 was piloted by Gonzalo Herrera.

The "exhausted" Cuban pilots had flown two missions, one on Saturday and one on Tuesday. Six aircraft were used on the Wednesday morning mission. Nine Americans were in five of the aircraft. Herrera piloted the sixth. Shamburger, Ray, Gray and Baker were shot down.

It was 9:45 A.M. The air operations at Happy Valley were over. In four days of combat the exile air force had flown more than thirty-six missions against overwhelming odds. (More than thirty-six missions would mean more than nine aircraft on a mission each day for four days in a row). It had fought an air battle against faster, more maneuverable planes, jets and conventional fighters that were supposed to have been destroyed on the ground. Its men were weary from lack of rest and sleep.

Thus *The Invisible Government* concludes its account of the Bay of Pigs invasion, and "settles the controversy" over the question of air cover.

Two other lengthy and equally "authoritative" accounts of the Bay of Pigs invasion also appear to establish that the invasion failed in spite of sustained efforts by "weary crews" who—"flew around the clock" to support the hard-pressed troops on the beaches—"losing six of eleven planes on D-day alone in the process", etc. etc. They are good stories, but that's all they are.

Decision for Disaster—"at last the truth about the Bay of Pigs"—was a feature length article in the September, 1964, *Readers Digest*. It was written by Dr. Mario Lazo, a Havana attorney "whose international connections in high places," according to the *Readers Digest*, "made it possible for him to speak in confidence with those who knew what happened in Washington during those critical days in April."

Dr. Lazo's story, while in some respects more accurate than the others, is sadly at odds with the facts where air activities are concerned. Dr. Lazo says the Brigade's B-26's flew in almost continual relays until, on Wednesday morning, a final mission was "pieced together." According to Dr. Lazo, on Wednesday morning only three flyable aircraft were left in Puerto Cabeza—two B-26's and a C-46. These last two B-26's were shot down says Dr. Lazo.

Dr. Lazo's version is so far from the facts that it would not be worthy of comment—except for one thing. Consider the readership of *Readers Digest*; somewhere up in the millions. And consider that Lazo got his information from "those who know at first hand."

The Bay of Pigs, was written by Haynes Johnson in collaboration with four of the Brigade's leaders, Manual Artime, Jose Perez San Roman, Erneido Oliva and Enrique Ruiz-Williams.

The Bay of Pigs is billed as "at long last the truth about the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba," and it purports to give "the inside account of what really went on at the White House meetings were the agony of decision was endured. . .and in the councils of the CIA and the Pentagon. . .In all and in detail, it is a heroic tale and a shocking revelation. . .His information comes from unimpeachable sources."

In his book Mr. Johnson describes some of the D-day (Monday) activity in the following passage: "Since Sunday night the Cuban pilots had been flying around the clock on what had become virtual suicide missions. By Wednesday morning nine of the sixteen B-26's had been shot down, and several of the remaining planes were in poor flying condition."

The author describes in detail an action he says took place on Monday morning between two B-26's, a Sea Fury, and a T-33 jet. He even quotes radio conversations between the pilots of the two B-26's. "Both brigade planes were shot down," says Johnson.

In describing these events, Mr. Johnson has the collaboration of leaders of the invasion force who were on the beaches themselves. Even faulty memories, made hazier by the pressures of the moment and the intervening years, would hardly leave them under any misapprehension as to what happened that day at the Bay of Pigs. The truth is, nevertheless, Cuban B-26 pilots did not "fly around the clock" on Monday morning. By Wednesday morning "nine of the B-26's had not been shot down, and the Monday morning dog-fight described in such detail never took place at all.

Mr. Johnson and his four collaborators describe even more sensational events. According to the authors the invasion was going to take place even if Washington had decided to call it off. The authors say that near the end of March the CIA official in charge of their training camp in Guatemala called Artime aside one day and told him that there were "forces in the administration trying to block the invasion" and that it might be called off.

"If this happens you come here and make some kind of show, as if you are putting us, the advisors, 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."

According to Johnson the CIA official was quite specific. The Brigade leaders were instructed that they were to place an armed brigade soldier at each American's door, cut communications with the outside, and continue the training until he told them when and how to leave for "Trampolinie" base. "In the end," he laughed, "we will win."

There was always the possibility that the planned invasion, conceived in the Eisenhower administration, might be dropped by the Kennedy administration. This possibility was recognized by some of the Cuban leaders in Guatemala, and it is true that plans for such a contingency had been made—plans, which if put into effect, would have created an enormously difficult problem for the United States. The story that Johnson tells, however, strains credulity to the breaking point. The

CIA official referred to is a high ranking army officer. What Johnson and his collaborators ask their readers to believe is that this officer proposed a course of action tantamount to mutiny, for which he could be cashiered and sent to prison. Whether it is intended to or not, of course, this story does serious discredit to the CIA in the eyes of anyone who accepts it at its face value.

In spite of Mr. Johnson's competence as a reporter, and the technical qualifications of his collaborators, *The Bay of Pigs* suffers in more ways than one from a lack of credibility and objectivity. It is understandable, for instance, that these gentlemen would have a high regard and share warm personal feelings for Attorney General Robert Kennedy. Too often however, their book gives the appearances of being more of a propaganda piece for Mr. Kennedy than an objective account of the events it describes. In fact, in many ways it reads as if it might have been written on the lawn at Hickory Hill in McClean, Virginia.

Theodore Sorrenson, a long time personal friend of President Kennedy, and a member of his White House staff from the beginning, also deals at length with the favorite subject of most Bay of Pigs critics. From his book, although he doesn't quite say so in so many words, the conclusion is inescapable that Sorrenson believes (as President Kennedy is presumed to have believed) that the President was virtually betrayed by the CIA. According to Sorrenson, it was a tragic error for the President to have ever put his faith and trust in this agency in the first place.

"The President was told," says Sorrenson, "the use of the exile brigade would make possible the toppling of Castro without actual aggression by the United States, without seeming to outsiders to violate our principles of non-intervention, with no risk of involvement and with little risk of failure.

"Could the exile brigade achieve its goals without our military participation? He was assured in writing that it could—a wild misjudgement.

"Were the members of the exile brigade willing to risk this effort without our mili-

tary participation, the President asked, and go ahead with the realization that we would not intervene if they failed? He was assured that they were—a serious misstatement, due at least in part to bad communication on the part of the CIA liaison officers."

Sorrenson describes the B-26's employed by the exile brigade as "lumbering, slow and unwieldy; unsuited to air cover." He says that the initial air strike on Saturday morning against Castro's air bases was "ineffective" and that "as a result the President was urged on Sunday by his foreign policy advisors—but without a formal meeting at which the military and CIA could be heard—to call off the Monday morning strike. . .The President concurred in that conclusion. The second strike was cancelled. The CIA objected strongly but, although given an opportunity, chose not to take the matter directly to the President."

Sorrenson also cites the foul up (he says) that occurred when the President authorized unmarked Navy jets to fly cover for one hour over the beaches at the Bay of Pigs on Wednesday morning. Here is the way Sorrenson describes that episode: ". . .receiving their instructions from the CIA, they (the B-26's) arrived on the scene an hour before the jets. Whether this tragic error was due to differences in time zones or to instructions, the B-26's were soon downed or gone. The jet mission was invalidated before it started."

In summing up his critique of the action at the Bay of Pigs, and following through with his left jab at the CIA, Sorrenson says: "The first strike, designed to be the key, turned out later to have been remarkably ineffective; and there is no reason to believe that Castro's air force, having survived the first and been dispersed into hiding, would have been knocked out by the second.

"The President's cancellation of the Monday morning air strike thus played only a minor role in the venture which came to so inglorious an end on Wednesday afternoon. It was already doomed long before Monday morning, and he would have been far wiser, he told me later, if when the basic premises of the plan were already being shattered, he

had cancelled the entire operation and not merely the second air strike. For it was clear to him by then that he had in fact approved a plan bearing little resemblance to what he thought he had approved."

Mr. Sorrenson says he got all his information from the President. He says, "In the days that followed the fiasco the President talked to me about it at length—in the mansion, in his office and as we walked on the White House lawns. He was aghast at his own stupidity, angry at having been badly advised by some and let down by others."

What is revealed so disturbingly by Bay of Pigs post-mortems are some of the dimensions of the "credibility gap"—a phrase that has come into common use to describe a condition many Americans fear has become endemic in the national government. This condition manifests itself in a practice by government officials of issuing statements which are not true concerning past and present activities, as well as future intentions, policies and goals, of the government and/or its agencies and departments.

All of the unpleasant connotations normally associated with lying, to use a simpler word, are disposed of by practitioners in the government by rationalizations which are linked, no matter how tenuously, to considerations of national security. Mr. Arthur Sylvester, formerly Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, is a leading protagonist for this line of reasoning. His views on the subject have been widely publicized, and it may be that the agency he formerly served has done more than its share to increase the width of the credibility gap to the point where it has become so easily visible to the naked eye.

Mr. Sylvester uses the story about the Lying Baptists became divided into two camps over point. According to this story, back in 1804, Baptists became divided into two camps over an issue involving a right to lie under certain circumstances. The question posed was whether a man with three children captured by a band of marauding Indians had the right to lie to protect the life of a fourth child who was hidden from the savages. The Lying Baptists

said yes. The Truthful Baptists said no. Mr. Sylvester sees a similarity here between the relationship of the government with the people, and the parent with the savages. He says he is a Lying Baptist, and argues that the government not only has "the right, indeed the duty, to lie...to protect the people", and that the government has "the inherent right...to save itself when faced with nuclear disaster."

Baptists and Indians notwithstanding, the credibility gap was not created by efforts of the government to mislead an enemy in order to protect the people of the United States; nor was it created by policies designed to withhold information from hostile hands. These are the most specious of arguments.

The credibility gap people in the United States worry about today has been created by a propensity of government "to lie to save itself" not just from nuclear disaster, but from all the disasters to which republican forms of government are inherently exposed. There is quite a difference, and many people feel justified in expecting their representatives in government to be able to make the distinction.

There are many facets to this issue and, of course, it is dangerously easy to oversimplify. But in an adventure like the one at the Bay of Pigs, for instance, it would not have been unreasonable for the U.S. government to have enunciated a policy, somewhere along the line, which spelled out our fear that the Castro regime had fallen under the domination of the international communist movement; that as a result it represented a threat to the peace and security of the United States and the rest of this hemisphere, and that our government now believed it would be necessary to do something about it. The mechanics, all the nuts and bolts that have to be put together to implement this policy, obviously should not be broadcast either abroad or at home.

All of which is *before* the fact.

After the fact either the government has successfully implemented a policy decision made in the interest of national security, or it has failed. In either case, the government should be prepared to answer some questions

—particularly if it has failed. The consequences of failure are obviously more far-reaching—at home and abroad.

At the Bay of Pigs the U.S. government failed. *Now* does the government have the right to lie to protect itself? Mr. Sylvester?

Perhaps the charismatic quality of President Kennedy's brief tenure in what is unquestionably the world's most exalted office does not deserve to be destroyed by anything that happened at the Bay of Pigs. After all, the President of the United States is not running a corner grocery store. Maybe where the long, hard look should be directed is toward those who did "let him down" and who advised him badly. But these are not the people suggested by Theodore Sorrenson in his book, nor by Haynes Johnson, nor by the high-level sources which were tapped by Messrs. Wise, Ross and Lazo.

Responsibility for the failure at the Bay of Pigs does not lie with the CIA or the Pentagon. It rests in the hands of President Kennedy himself and the intimate associates on his staff to whom he turned for counsel in the early days of his administration.

In the final analysis there is no great mystery about the Bay of Pigs. Nothing subversive nor divisive was involved. The disaster at the Bay of Pigs was produced by timidity, indecisiveness and poor judgment at the highest, policy-making levels of government—which is at the White House, in the White House staff and the President's cabinet. If, as Theodore Sorrenson says, the mission at the Bay of Pigs "was doomed from the start", then it is necessary to locate the beginning of the end at the point where President Kennedy cancelled the original CIA-Pentagon plan to launch the invasion at Trinidad.

Now ring the bell, call in the passing plane
which carries home the signature of peace.
Now close the door, domesticate again,
And revel in the softness of release.

Yet know: beards grow, the jungle will encroach,
The unwatched child may stare beneath the wheel,
The near and dear recede, the far approach,
The neighbor-nations fabricate in steel.

Another hand may ring the watchman's bell,
An alien tongue proclaim that all is well.

—Carlos Baker, 1956

THE AFTERMATH AND THE CIA

For almost two years following the unsuccessful invasion attempt at the Bay of Pigs, an impression was allowed to take root and to grow that the invasion had failed because of a last minute decision by President Kennedy to cancel planned U.S. Military air support for the invading forces. If such a decision had been made it would have been entirely consistent with President Kennedy's often repeated policy statements to the effect that under no circumstances would the United States government intervene militarily in the affairs of the Cuban government. The conflict, as the President pointed out only four days before the invasion was launched, was not between the United States and Cuba, but between Cubans and Cubans. The fact is, no such decision was necessary. No such decision was ever made. There had never been any plan to use United States military air forces in the invasion in the first place.

Never-the-less, it was widely accepted that references to a lack of air support at the Bay of Pigs were references to this policy decision by the President. This was the view held by a group of editors who met with the President on May 10, 1961. It was the view held by many members of Congress, and probably by

most of the general public. For a long time no official reference was ever made to the intended role in the invasion for the exile group's *own* air force—or even to the existence of such an air force.

Back in Birmingham, in 1962, I had become managing editor of a weekly newspaper. With a growing feeling of disenchantment and a sense of wonder, I followed the scuffling around in high places to get the story straight on the Bay of Pigs. I finally decided to write a story for my own newspaper. In doing so, I had three principal objectives in mind. One was to make public the fact that the Cuban invasion forces had gone ashore on Monday, April 17, 1961, without air support because the President had withheld their own aircraft—not U.S. military jets. Another was to point out that widespread efforts to shift responsibilities for the failure to the shoulders of the CIA amounted to nothing more than high-level buck passing. My third reason for publishing this story concerned the wives and families of the four men who lost their lives at the Bay of Pigs.

The deaths of Riley, Leo, Pete and Wade created a problem for the government. Their

disappearance had to be explained. Then, too, there was the matter of the insurance we had all signed for at the time we signed our contracts.

The cover story devised by the CIA, and relayed to the families of the four flyers by Alex Carlson of Miami, was that all four men had been employed by a group of Cubans whom Carlson represented. According to this cover story, the men had been lost on a flight in a cargo plane between Florida and Central America. The "Cubans" who employed the four airmen had provided insurance for the them and had set up a trust fund which would provide each of the widows with a lifetime income of \$550 per month. This same story was given to the press. Newspapers quoted Carlson as saying that "the men knew what they were getting into and they would have had a nice little nest egg if they had gotten back."

Naturally, the government had to provide a cover story and perhaps this is the best they could come up with at the time. There were several things about the way the affair was handled that rubbed me the wrong way, and which became more irksome with the passage of time and the continuous buck-passing that was going on in Washington.

I was aware, of course, that in Birmingham the activities of many of our people during the time of the Bay of Pigs invasion was an "open secret". There was no certain knowledge of exact details or of precisely who had been involved (there are some who have gotten mileage of sorts around Birmingham by saying they did participate, but who did not). But among their friends and associates in flying circles in Birmingham there was little doubt but that Riley, Leo, Pete and Wade had been killed during the invasion at the Bay of Pigs.

Such speculation was all well enough for friends and acquaintances, but how about the widows and the children? The story they were told (and they had no real alternative but to accept it) by the people who had employed their husbands (presumably) made it sound as if the four men, with heavy family

responsibilities, had somehow been persuaded to go off on a hare-brained adventure for purely monetary gain and had lost their lives in the process, leaving behind widows and children who would have to face the future as the doubtful beneficiaries of an anonymous group of wealthy Cubans. True, the monthly checks began to arrive from the Bankers' Trust Company in New York, but there was never anything in hand to show that a contractual obligation existed—nothing that any of them could borrow a nickle on at the bank to finance a child's education, or to pay for a costly illness, or to buy a home. (The Alabama State Legislature has since passed a bill which provides for education at state expense at any state university for any child of the four men who lost their lives).

"There," I said to myself, "but for the grace of God, go my wife and seven children."

I mailed the complete text of my story to Attorney General Robert Kennedy several weeks in advance of its publication. When the story was published, I distributed 500 copies of the newspaper to members of Congress in Washington. I received no acknowledgement from the Attorney General, but during the last week in January, 1963, he arranged an interview with David Kraslow of the Knight newspaper chain. In this interview, and in a subsequent interview with U.S. News and World Report, Robert Kennedy volunteered that the President had never reneged on a promise to supply U.S. Navy jets at the Bay of Pigs for the reason that no such promise nor any such plans had ever been made. The Attorney General said the invaders "got all the air cover the plan called for" and he said that the fact that "there was not sufficient air cover at the beach was one of the several major mistakes" responsible for the failure to liberate Cuba. "The plan that was used," he said, "was cleared by the CIA and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It was programmed at the Pentagon in whatever manner they do these things."

Mr. Kennedy of course, was putting them on. He knew better. The original plan for the military operation against Castro may have been "programmed at the Pentagon" and cleared by the CIA, but the operation as it was

conducted at the Bay of Pigs had little resemblance to the original plan—a circumstance for which neither the Pentagon nor the CIA was responsible.

Although he never explained why he did it, the revival of the Bay of Pigs issue by Attorney General Kennedy in 1963 created a storm in Congress. I don't imagine that the fact was entirely lost on members of Congress that his re-opening of the question also coincided with the distribution of my newspaper story.

Senator Goldwater told the Senate that the Kennedy administration should make public all official reports on the invasion and that the administration should end its efforts to tamper with history. Senator Dirksen proposed making a preliminary inquiry of his own. Other Senators proposed a Senate investigation to get the entire story historically correct. President Kennedy who was usually quite articulate, found it difficult to speak coherently on the Bay of Pigs. On January 24, 1963, the following exchange took place at the President's press conference at the White House.

Question: "There seems to be some question on the part of history involving the Bay of Pigs invasion. As you know, the Attorney General says that no United States air support was contemplated so therefore there was none to be withdrawn.

"Yet today the Editor Jack Gore of the Fort Lauderdale, Florida, News says that in a group of editors who visited with you on May 10, 1961, recall then the air cover was available but you had decided not to use it. Mr. Gore says you told these editors that one reason for your decision was that Ambassador (Adlai E.) Stevenson had complained that any such action would make a liar out of you in the U.N.

"Now also today a Mr. Manuel Penobos who has been rather vocal for the last day or two, a member of Brigade 2506, he says that the United States military instructors of that Brigade promised the men that they could expect air cover. Now there is a wealth of seemingly different stories and I am wondering if

you could set us straight on what the real situation was?"

President Kennedy: "Yes, there was no United States air cover planned, and so that the first part of the statement attributed to the Attorney General is correct. What was talked about was the question of an air strike on Monday morning by planes which were flown by—our B-26 planes—which were flown by pilots based in—not in the United States, not American planes. That strike as the Attorney General's interview in U.S. News and World Report describes it was postponed until Monday afternoon.

"I think the members of the Brigade were under the impression that the planes which were available were the B-26 planes and would give them protection on the beaches. That did not work out. That was one of the failures—the jets, the training jets, which were used against them were very effective, and, therefore, we were not—the Brigade was not able to maintain air supremacy on the beach so I think that the confusion comes from the use of the word air cover."

"Let's talk about United States air cover as opposed to air cover from—which was attached to the Brigade, some of which flew from various parts of the continent not from the United States, so that, I think that, therefore—as I said from the beginning, the operation was a failure and that the responsibility rests with the White House."

In commenting on the effectiveness of Castro's jet trainers, President Kennedy did not mention the fact that the Cuban invasion forces also had two T-33 jets manned and ready to go in Florida. These fighters were not put into action.

Members of Congress were far from satisfied. Senator Goldwater pointed out that "there was no denial from the White House nor from the Attorney General, when stories were printed throughout the American press that air cover was withheld on orders of the President."

"They should have left it alone," said Goldwater. "It is a black blot on American