

SECRET

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3 meetings

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

PARAMILITARY STUDY GROUP MEETING

AT CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

25 APRIL 1961

1000 HOURS

PRESENT

GENERAL TAYLOR

MR. KENNEDY

MR. DULLES

ADMIRAL BURKE

GENERAL CABELL

GENERAL GRAY

MR. BARNES

MR. MOORHOUSE

MR. ESTERLINE

COLONEL BEERLI

COLONEL HAWKINS

MR. KING

COLONEL INGELIDG

LT COLONEL TARMATER

COMMANDER MITCHELL

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QUESTION: What limitations were placed on CIA with regard to using U. S. military personnel.

ANSWER: There was no legal limit on the numbers or types of personnel that could be assigned, the only limiting consideration being the problem of disclosure.

SUGGESTION: It would be helpful if the President was given a memo setting forth the evidences of the direct involvement of Communist personnel in the operation.

RESPONSE: CIA agreed to prepare such a memorandum for the President with information copies for the Paramilitary Study Group.

REQUEST: It was requested that a paper and/or map covering a period several months prior to the invasion be prepared indicating all Cubans prepared to revolt.

RESPONSE: CIA indicated that a map had been prepared indicating the agents with whom they were in contact and that this would be provided to General Taylor.

QUESTION: Had an attempt been made to have anyone enter the objective area for reconnaissance prior to the operation.

ANSWER: No. For security reasons and because photographs had given no evidence of any significant activity in the area.

QUESTION: What were the sources of intelligence prior to the operation.

ANSWER: SpecInt, agent reports and photographs. Photographs were received at least several times a week.

REQUEST: That some of these photographs be made available to the Study Group.

RESPONSE: CIA agreed to make these photographs available.

STATEMENT: The point was made that not only U. S. troops were restricted in the action they could take, but we prevented foreigners that we had trained from using their weapons to their maximum capability.

STATEMENT: One of the greatest problems encountered in developing this force was the difficulty in getting the Cubans to sublimate their petty differences for the common good.

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STATEMENT: One fact that misled our estimate of the opposition we would meet was that prior to the Zapata Operation there has never been a pitched battle between Cubans.

REQUEST: That all professional military people involved in the operation and in training the force be identified.

RESPONSE: CIA indicated this would be provided.

QUESTION: At some point would it be desirable to have the conclusions of all key people involved in the operation.

ANSWER: Yes.

REQUEST: General Taylor requested a re-briefing on the Air Plan and further information on the reported air ammunition shortage.

RESPONSE: CIA indicated this would be provided.

REQUEST: General Taylor requested the reconstitution of the intelligence that influenced the decisions, this to be presented in such form as to indicate the decisions influenced.

At this point Colonel Hawkins briefed on the actual operation. He prefaced his remarks by pointing out that the information on which his report was based was limited and incomplete.

When the 15 April air strikes were originally considered it was suggested that they be conducted for two days without restriction. However, due to political considerations it was decided to conduct limited strikes on D-2 and limited strikes on dawn of D-Day. It was decided to use two B-26 aircraft against each of three airfields on which all Cuban tactical aircraft were based, San Antonio de los Banos, Campo Libertad, and Santiago de Cuba.

Reconnaissance flights on 8, 11 and 13 April indicated the Cubans had 36 combat aircraft although many of these were not operable. Consequently it was decided to increase the aircraft in the air strikes from six to eight with one additional aircraft assigned as a spare.

The D-2 air strikes were planned to destroy Castro's combat aircraft on the ground. It now appears that these air strikes destroyed all of Castro's tactical aircraft except for two Sea Furies, two B-26s, and three to four T-33s.

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Opinions were expressed generally favoring the view that if the D-Day air strikes had been conducted as originally planned all of Castro's tactical aircraft would have been destroyed or at least eliminated to the extent that the invasion force could have survived.

It was pointed out that all but eight or nine operable aircraft had been destroyed and that four of these were eliminated on D Day by the invasion force.

The question was raised as to why the T-33s had not been destroyed. Several possible answers were given, including the restriction against the use of napalm, self-imposed by CIA, and the possibility that the aircraft on one runway had not been attacked.

QUESTION: Were you surprised at the effectiveness of the T-33s.

ANSWER: Yes.

QUESTION: What led to the decision to conduct air strikes on D-2.

ANSWER: The strikes were timed to coincide with Nino Diaz landing in the Oriente and it was desired to tie the air strikes in with the defections.

STATEMENT: We knew before the landing that Castro retained operational operational tactical aircraft.

QUESTION: Why were limitations placed on the air strikes.

ANSWER: In order to reduce the appearance of a major military operation which would indicate U. S. involvement.

STATEMENT: It is a mistake to focus primary attention on one particular decision. We were operating under the very clear instructions to make this operation appear as one the Cubans could conduct without gross U. S. assistance.

STATEMENT: It was not one decision or one thing that caused failure, but many things.

STATEMENT: In covert operations of this kind political considerations always outweigh the military, with a consequent erosion of the military capability to the point that the operation becomes militarily infeasible.

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STATEMENT: This raises one of the vital considerations before this Group, the conflict between the desire for political acceptability and military effectiveness.

STATEMENT: The point was made that political considerations must be given their due weight, but if this results in making the operation militarily infeasible the President should be advised that the plan is no longer feasible. He cannot be expected to remember all the details of a plan nor the significance of one seemingly minor change in a military operation.

STATEMENT: The President had frequent consultations with military representatives.

STATEMENT: The DOD was not consulted in the decision to call off the air strikes.

STATEMENT: It is dangerous to conduct meetings where military advice is required when only one officer from one service is present. This was the case during six or eight meetings.

QUESTION: Were the D-Day air strikes previously approved.

ANSWER: The paper setting forth the air strikes was passed around at the April 12th meeting. This paper made clear that there would be air strikes, but not an all-out effort. However, this document was only passed around at the meeting, read and considered by some, and collected after the meeting. It is doubtful if the President read it or understood the details.

QUESTION: What led to the cancellation of the air strikes.

ANSWER: At 1300 Sunday it was understood that the plan, including the air strikes for dawn of D-Day, had been approved. At about 7:00 P.M. CIA representatives were called to Mr. Rusk's office. He was concerned over the apparent defection of two rather than one B-26 and an additional cargo plane because he felt these additional defections had caused him to mislead Mr. Stevenson. At 10:30 P.M. the CIA tactical commander was advised that the air strikes had been called off. He most strongly urged that this decision be reconsidered and reversed. In debating the air strikes question and in discussing the action to be taken to strengthen

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Mr. Stevenson's position, the President was contacted. In discussing the air strike question the President said he wasn't aware that there were going to be any air strikes on the morning of D-Day. At 2315 D-1 Mr. Rusk announced that there would be no dawn air strikes. At this time the invasion ships were within 5,000 yards of their landing beaches and it was physically impossible to call off the strikes.

QUESTION: Was a strong position on this issue taken with Mr. Rusk.

ANSWER: Probably not strong enough. It was indicated that the worst would be that the invaders would not have their B-26 support and if the ships were on their way out the force would be denied its resupply capability.

QUESTION: At the 12 April meeting were the air strikes an issue.

ANSWER: No, the plan appeared to have jelled.

STATEMENT: There were only verbal instructions. These were not written, signed directives and the only papers that were available were fuzzy. The issues were never clearly resolved.

STATEMENT: I understood there was to be one final briefing involving all the participants and setting forth the entire plan. This was never done. Had this briefing been held the ultimate decisions might have been different.

STATEMENT: After cancellation of the air strikes an attempt was made to minimize the probable damage. At 0400 D-Day a CIA representative contacted the State Department to see if the Navy's protective CAP could be extended from the 20-mile limit to 15 or preferably a three-mile limit. The State Department objected and the President, in attempting to prevent U. S. attribution, confirmed that the Navy's protective CAP limit would not be changed. He did approve, however, EW support. Prior to this Presidential determination an alerting order had been sent to CINCLANT and he had turned his force around to be in a position to provide CAP and EW support if so ordered.

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By the time it became apparent we would not receive air CAP we sent out a message to put the troops ashore and move the ships out to sea.

The brigade troops commenced landing at Blue Beach at 0100.

0300 - The CARIBE had completed unloading.

0330 - The troops unloading from the ALANTICO were under fire.

0430 - Troops landed at Blue Beach.

0600 - First LCU ashore.

0630 - Enemy air attacks against shipping and Blue Beach commenced.

0640 - Friendly aircraft arrived.

1730 - Three LCUs had discharged vehicles and tanks.

0825 - Castro T-33 shot down by BLAGAR.

0930 - RIO ESCONDIDO hit and sunk. Crew members rescued and put aboard BLAGAR.

- Brigade reported airstrip ready for use.

1000 - Continuous enemy air attacks against withdrawing ships.

1130 - Brigade reported only four hours ammunition left.

During the Blue Beach landings the HUSTON proceeded up the Bay led by the BARBARA J. They sent a reconnaissance team ashore and it was immediately attacked from the west flank. Two hundred seventy men did land in the vicinity of Red Beach. However, going ashore they saw lights from what appeared to be a construction project which they had not been previously aware of, and when they got ashore they ran into an enemy force estimated to have 300 troops and 12 tanks.

As the HUSTON was proceeding out of the Bay it was hit by a bomb and the ship went aground with approximately 130 personnel aboard.

As regards the airborne landing little detailed information is available. However, all the aircraft returned safely reporting that the troops had jumped over their intended landing places. Furthermore, reports indicate some of the airborne personnel were occupying their assigned positions.

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During the course of D-Day the decision was made to conduct night air attacks against San Antonio de los Baños and Campo Libertad in an attempt to destroy Castro's air capability. The value of these attacks was negligible.

Also during the night of 17-18 April three air drops were made at the landing beaches. One landed in the drop zone, one in the sea, and one drifted inland.

On D+1 at about 0730 the 2d Battalion reported it could not maintain its position without air support for more than 30 minutes.

0824 - The Brigade Commander reported that Blue Beach was under attack by 12 tanks and four jet aircraft. The need for ammunition and supplies was repeated.

1010 - Red Beach wiped out.

1200 - Blue Beach under attack by MIG-15s and T-33s, out of tank ammunition, and almost out of small arms ammunition.

1600 - ESSEX reported long line of tanks and trucks approaching Blue Beach from East.

Enemy air attacks and shortage of ammunition continued to be reported for the rest of the day. Ammunition and food were air-dropped on the airstrip. On the afternoon of D+1 three friendly B-26s intercepted a column of enemy tanks and trucks, causing 1,800 casualties. At this point it was emphasized that the over-all plan had been based on control of the air and this action was cited as evidence of what the B-26s would have been able to accomplish if the air plan had succeeded.

1900 - 1st Battalion reported under heavy artillery attack.

2000 - The Brigade Commander was advised that he would be evacuated after dark. He replied saying, "I will not be evacuated. We will fight to the end here if we have to."

During the night of 18-19 April Navy CAP was again requested and permission was granted for one hour air CAP between 0630 and 0730. These aircraft were issued instructions to defend the invasion force from enemy air attack, but not to attack ground targets.

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When it came time for the friendly forces to launch their air strikes the Cuban air crews were either exhausted or demoralized by the lack of air cover, consequently American crews were dispatched. One American crew was shot down during the period of Navy air cover and another was shot down when air cover was not provided.

At 0600 on the 19th of April enemy air strikes commenced. From 0710 to 1430 the enemy was closing in and the Brigade Commander was sending frantic appeals for air cover. Finally at 1430 he sent his final message saying, "Am destroying all equipment and communications. Tanks are in sight. I have nothing left to fight with. Am taking to woods. I cannot wait for you."

QUESTION: What sort of anti-tank equipment did the force have?

ANSWER: A number of 3.5-inch bazookas; five tanks; two 75 mm recoilless rifles; and an undetermined number of anti-tank mines.

STATEMENT: In considering the possible reasons for the shooting down of the B-26 during the period of Navy air CAP it was suggested that the rules of engagement may have unduly restricted the Navy.

QUESTION: What specific intelligence got to the President?

ANSWER: NIEs, intelligence annexes and briefings.

STATEMENT: It would be desirable to examine the ground rules and determine the price we paid to try and keep within political limitations.

STATEMENT: It appears this operation was simply too big to remain covert.

Colonel Beerli, head of Air Operations for the CIA, briefed on air aspects of the operation. His position for this operation was coordinate with Colonel Hawkins. Lieutenant Colonel Gaines was his chief deputy for this operation. Lieutenant Colonel Gaines had a staff of 14 people working on this operation in Washington. Except for the security, administration and cover people the personnel assigned were members of the Air Force. The actual training site in Guatemala was run primarily by Major Campbell with a force of 20 people.

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The point was made that one of the greatest procedural difficulties resulted from the physical separation of the air staff from the rest of the planners under Colonel Hawkins.

Colonel Beerli stated that he had 316 personnel at Puerto Cabezas, of whom 159 were Americans. The Cuban crews were recruited in Miami from 92 personnel that were screened. From these personnel they recruited and/or developed 17 B-26 crews and five C-46 crews. As far as the concept of air operations was concerned the concept varied very little from the beginning. The primary effort was being directed toward eliminating the enemy air force and to provide close support. On the 13th of April the photos indicated that Castro's combat aircraft were located on three airfields. On D-2 eight aircraft were committed against these fields with the results previously mentioned. It was pointed out that the B-26s had been the primary concern and the capability of the T-33s hadn't been appreciated as it wasn't believed that these aircraft were armed.

By late afternoon of D-1 photos indicated that instead of dispersing his aircraft Castro had concentrated them at San Antonio de los Banos.

After the cancellation of the dawn air strikes on D-Day the pilots were briefed to provide close support for the invasion force with at least two aircraft over the beach at all times. Thirteen missions were launched on D-Day in providing close support to the invasion force and in protecting against hostile vessels.

That night six B-26 aircraft were launched against Cuban airfields. However, two aircraft aborted on take-off and the others were not able to identify their targets due to haze.

On D+1 six aircraft were scheduled in support of the beach-head. On the night of D+1 two aircraft got off and struck San Antonio de los Banos. On Wednesday morning two B-26s were committed again and two more were lost.

In summary there were 13 strikes on D-Day, four on D-Day night, six on D+1, and seven on D+2, for a total of 39 air strikes. Seven

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aircraft were lost in these operations. Furthermore, six C-54s made air resupply drops and one C-46 landed on the beachhead airstrip on the evening of D-Day.

STATEMENT: It is believed that the Cuban pilots did as well as could be expected and they would have done better in an aura of victory.

Following this the Group were read a paper by Colonel Hawkins in which he set forth his personal opinion as to some of the deficiencies which became apparent during the operation. Among these deficiencies were:

The lack of clear-cut policy directives- signed. He does not believe that verbal instructions are sufficient.

The slowness of government machinery in making policy decisions.

Overcentralization of control. This prompted some discussion, resulting in the statement that the CIA doesn't have the capability to organize and train paramilitary forces. At this point a message was read from Colonel Hawkins just prior to the invasion in which he indicated that the invasion force was better armed and equipped than some U. S. Infantry units and that Lieutenant Colonel Gaines believed the air unit was as well qualified as the best U. S. Air Force squadron.

Lack of adequate organization and staff. The paramilitary responsibility should go to the DOD.

Training conditions were unsatisfactory. The desirability of using bases on Saipan or in the United States were considered with no conclusions reached.

The meeting adjourned.