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Kennedy's Curious Decisions Cited in Cuban Invasion Story

WHAT went wrong with the U.S.-sponsored invasion of Cuba is rapidly becoming an open secret.

In a new contribution to the historical record, Charles J. V. Murphy of Fortune magazine's Washington Bureau tells how President Kennedy whitewashed down the landing expedition with conflicting decisions that doomed it.

Mr. Murphy's play-by-play account in September Fortune bears the earmarks, at least, of co-operation by high military sources. The facts set forth put Mr. Kennedy in the role of a man seemingly trying to invade and not to invade at the same time.

The result, as Mr. Murphy shows, was the political defeat of the liberation project. It cannot properly be called a military failure—scant recompense for the men who died on the beachhead—since the military plan was never carried out.

THE INVASION was, of course, an operation of the Central Intelligence Agency. The Department of Defense assisted but had no direct responsibility.

The manager of the project was Richard M. Bissell, a deputy of Allen W. Dulles, CIA's director. An economist, Mr. Bissell is described by Mr. Murphy as "a highly practical executive."

Exiles from Fidel Castro's Cuba were being recruited in the United States and trained in Guatemala in the summer of 1960. By fall, a small air contingent was developed, with obsolete B-26s and some transporters for paratroopers.

President Eisenhower was kept informed. His last thorough review of the venture was in November, before any final plan had taken form. A plan was reviewed, however, by the Joint Chiefs of Staff early in January, before the change in Administration.

MR. KENNEDY, upon taking office, asked for a CIA briefing, which was given by Director Dulles and Mr. Bissell. The new President then got a favorable appraisal of CIA's plan from the Joint Chiefs.

The action, as outlined in the briefing, was to be carried out by the CIA.



RICHARD M. BISSELL
He was manager of project.

rior was to be near the scene to lend help if needed.

When giving the project a green light in January, the President warned those in direct charge that he might call it off. Evenly proved that he could have done so up to noon of April 18.

The decision had to be Mr. Kennedy's. He could have canceled the undertaking if convinced of its immorality, or for any reason he deemed valid, such as lack of sanctions under either domestic or international law, or political expediency at the time.

AFTER VARIOUS delays, the invasion was set for April 17. At the State Department on April 4, Mr. Bissell previewed the landing for the President, the Secretaries of State, Treasury and Defense, and other military and political advisers of Mr. Kennedy.

J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, was also present.

Others were for going ahead. Adlai Stevenson was emphatic, saying that a showdown with communism in this hemisphere had to come anyway. Secretary of State Rusk's reservations and the opposition of Under Secretary Bowles, not present, were not in evidence until later.

From this point to the end, political considerations dominated.

APART FROM failure to make any big decision—whether to have an all-out assault or call it off—there was no lack of decisions. President Kennedy ran the show, making these rulings:

- 1 That planes from a U.S. carrier would NOT be on call.
- 1 That the Cuban exiles were to use their B-26s just twice. They were to strike Castro's airfield on April 15, then strike again on the 17th, the morning of the landing. The first strike was a success, but four obsolete B-26 jet trainers that Castro had inherited from Batista were undamaged. Using rockets, they could be deadly.
- 1 That the landing area was to be about 100 miles west from the Cuban city of Trinidad to the Bay of Pigs. This was only a week before the embarkation.
- 1 That the dropping of leaflets and the broadcasting of appeals to the Cuban people would be canceled.

1 That the Cuban exiles were NOT to strike with their B-26s, on the morning of the landing. This decision, the evening before the assault, resulted from the raid of April 15. A concocted report had been given out that Castro's own defecting airmen had done the bombing. Adlai Stevenson, uninformed of what was going on, had vouched for this in the United Nations.

1 That planes from the U.S. carrier Boxer would NOT protect the landing ships if they withdrew to international waters. The President was awakened at 4 o'clock in the morning of D-day to decide this.

1 That the exiles' B-26s could attack Castro's airfields. This, at noon on April 17, followed word that the landing had failed ill for lack of air support. A small attacking force on the morning of the 18th found the fields fogged in.

1 That jets from the Boxer would protect ships supplying the landed infantrymen on the beachhead. This was to be for exactly one hour, starting at 1:30 AM on April 18, while the remaining B-26s hit as hard as they could.

1 THIS BOXER decision, which ends the series, was reached about 2 AM of the same day, after a White House reception for Congress and the Cabinet. It would leave an interesting problem for historians: Why the one-hour limitation? Was it legality or morality? If so, was one hour less illegal or less immoral than two hours or more? If there was to be participation at all, then why was not victory—the defeat of the "Bad Neighbor"—the dominant consideration?

The defeat of the expedition was complete.