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President Explains Bay of Pigs Plan

U. S. Air Cover Pledge Denied

By Carroll Kilpatrick
Staff Reporter

President Kennedy yesterday entered the new controversy over the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion with the assertion that no United States air cover was ever planned to help the Cuban attackers.

What was planned, and what proved to be a failure, he said, was a strike by B-26 bombers flown by pilots not based in the United States.

The invasion brigade thought that this attack would give it protection on the beach, but Cuban jets "were very effective" and the invasion brigade "was not able to maintain air supremacy on the beach," the President said.

He replied to questions raised at his news conference following moves by Senate Minority Leader Everett M. Dirksen (R-Ill.) and Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.) for an investigation on the question of air cover.

The controversy was heightened yesterday when a Florida editor and a brigade member claimed that United States air cover was promised but was withdrawn when it was most needed.

Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy said in an interview last week that no air cover was ever promised, and the President said his brother's report was correct. Instead of ending a controversy, however, the Attorney General's comment spurred the critics on to new demands for a full-scale inquiry.

President Kennedy also replied to questions about a re-

ported new buildup of Soviet weapons in Cuba. He said a Soviet ship has arrived in Cuba since the October crisis "which may have arms on it, possibly military cargo."

But he said that there was no military buildup in the sense of equipment coming in from outside Cuba. "There is no evidence that this ship carried any offensive weapons," the President said.

Some 4500 Soviet technicians have been withdrawn

Eleven hundred and sixty Cuban refugees leave Havana aboard freighter Shirley Lykes bound for Port Everglades, Fla.

Page A4.

from Cuba since October, he said, and there are 16,000 or 17,000 Russians still there, operating technical equipment and building barracks. Some of the Russians are in organized military units, he said.

"Our scrutiny of Cuba is daily," the President said.

Secretary of State Dean Rusk is scheduled to testify today before a Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee inquiring into the reports of a continuing Soviet buildup in Cuba.

Sen. Kenneth B. Keating (R-N. Y.) said yesterday the buildup consists of tanks, guns, fighter planes and other weapons but not long-range missiles and bombers.

Keating said he had learned from refugee sources that Soviet military activity on Cuba is 10 times greater than it was

last July 1 before the missile crisis.

In the House, Rep. William E. Minshall (R-Ohio) introduced a resolution calling for creation of a Joint House-Senate Committee to make a full-scale investigation of the Bay of Pigs invasion.

Referring to the Attorney General's comment that no air cover was promised, Minshall said "this tremendously important controversy transcends political parties and partisan motivations. At this late date, an honest, accurate report of events leading up to and including the invasion would not break security."

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara and other Pentagon officials are expected to be questioned about reports of a new Cuban buildup when they appear before the House Armed Services Committee for an annual military review next Wednesday.

Chairman Carl A. Vinson (D-Ga.) said he had no information to support Keating's assertion, but he said: "We'll ask all about that."

Shortly before President Kennedy's news conference, Cuban exile fighter Manuel Penabaz said at a press conference here that "all our brigade leaders and fighters believed that air cover would be furnished by U. S. air and naval forces."

Penabaz called the Attorney General ill-informed when he

said air cover was not promised.

"Certainly we in the brigade were assured by our American military instructors that we would be given air cover sufficient to succeed in our mission," Penabaz insisted.

If there was to have been United States air cover, the President said, "you might as well have a complete United States' commitment, which would have meant a full-fledged invasion."

The other assertion that air cover was promised came from Jack W. Gore, editor and publisher of the Fort Lauderdale News. Gore and six other Florida editors visited the President at the White House on May 10, 1961, the editor said.

Gore said the President told them he canceled the plan for air cover. The President related that Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson was concerned that "any such action would make a liar out of him in the United Nations."

Noting that the meeting with the President was off-the-record, Gore said he felt released from his pledge when the Attorney General commented on the issue.

"What Robert Kennedy hoped to accomplish by coming out at this late date and denying that any air cover had ever been planned, The News cannot fathom," Gore wrote.

The President said there was no such conversation of the kind Gore related.