

# THE TIMETABLE HISTORY OF CUBA COMPILED BY J.A.SIERRA

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## ATTACK at Bay of Pigs

"Events are the ephemera of history."  
Fernand Braudel

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### Introduction

From the end of WWII and up until the mid eighties, most Americans could agree on one thing; *communism* was the enemy. Communists wanted to destroy us. To change our way of life. To subvert the values of the "free-est" country in the world. Even after Senator Joseph McCarthy went out of fashion, the concept that we were engaged in mortal combat against communism lived on.

To most Americans the idea seemed perfectly normal and very urgent. It was also understood that *they* didn't play by the rules. They lied, cheated, bribed, manipulated, murdered and did whatever else they had to do to win, which meant that if *we* wanted to win, we'd have to beat them at their game.

Senator John F. Kennedy, the young, liberal catholic making a bid for the big chair in the oval office knew that the only way to get that chair was to ride the popular wave of anti-communism. In the process, Kennedy became obsessed with Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

One reason for this obsession may be the widely believed concept that *all communism emerged from the same source* and had a unified goal: to subvert imperialism and take over the world. The source, of course, was the Soviet Union.

Today we laugh at the idea of a U.S. president entertaining such uninformed and unenlightened ideas, and we shiver at the fact that he would base U.S. foreign policy on them. But Kennedy went on to become both an avid anticommunist and a U.S. president.

In this global climate of ignorance, fear, dis-information and presidential machismo, the Cuban revolution emerged in 1959. Within a year, President Eisenhower was sad to learn that Cuba's revolution was, indeed, a social revolution and not just the exchange of one crooked regime for another, and relations with the U.S. began to deteriorate.

In July of 1960, Soviet Prime Minister Nikita Krushchev spoke of "figurative"

rockets that would protect Cuba from the U.S., and President Eisenhower announced that the United States would not "tolerate the establishment of a regime dominated by international communism in the western hemisphere."

Beginning in January of 1960, CIA planes from Florida, some with American pilots, raided Cuban fields with napalm-type bombs to burn sugar cane fields, and, as stated by Herbert L. Matthews in his insightful book, *Revolution In Cuba*, the CIA "did everything that it could to bring about the overthrow of the Castro government."

As relations between the U.S. and Cuba continued to deteriorate, U.S. Ambassador to Cuba, Philip Bonsal, was recalled to Washington on October 28, ending his assignment. On January 3, 1961, seventeen days before Kennedy took office, the Eisenhower administration broke off diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Various assassination attempts by the CIA against Castro had failed, and the American people were confused about Cuba's political climate. The right-wing press continued to assert that Cuba was a threat to the U.S., and "something" had to be done.

In his first State of the Union address on January 30, 1961, President Kennedy declared that Communist domination in this hemisphere "can never be negotiated." But even before the revolution celebrated its first year, Castro and the Cuban revolutionaries knew that the U.S. would attack.

The expected attack would likely resemble the CIA invasion of Guatemala (May 17, 1954). About a thousand men gathered inside the Honduran border, where the U.S. military supplied them with planes, weapons and money. The end result was a new U.S.-friendly government, with little change for the mass peasant poverty or tiny wealthy minority of that country.

## The Plan

Vice President Richard Nixon was committed to the idea of opposing Castro as early as April 1959, when Castro visited the U.S. as a guest of the American Society of Newspaper Editors. "If he's not a communist," said Nixon, "he certainly acts like one." On March 17, 1960, President Eisenhower approved a CIA plan titled "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime."

The CIA's plan included: 1) the creation of a responsible and unified Cuban opposition to the Castro regime located outside of Cuba, 2) the development of a means for mass communication to the Cuban people as part of a powerful propaganda offensive, 3) the creation and development of a covert intelligence and action organization within Cuba which would respond to the orders and directions of the exile opposition, and 4) the development of a paramilitary force outside of Cuba for future guerrilla action. These goals were to be achieved "in such a manner as to avoid the appearance of U.S. intervention."

The project came to life when Eisenhower approved an initial budget of \$4,400,000: political action, \$950,000; propaganda, \$1,700,000; paramilitary, \$1,500,000; intelligence collection, \$250,000. The invasion, a year later, would cost over \$46 million.

On January 3, 1961, a meeting took place at the White House, described by Richard Bissell, CIA Director of Plans, in his book MEMOIRS OF A COLD WARRIOR: FROM YALTA TO BAY OF PIGS:

“The president (Eisenhower) seemed to be eager to take forceful action against Castro, and breaking off diplomatic relations appeared to be his best card. He noted that he was prepared to ‘move against Castro’ before Kennedy’s inauguration on the twentieth if a ‘really good excuse’ was provided by Castro. ‘Failing that,’ he said, ‘perhaps we could think of manufacturing something that would be generally acceptable.’ ... This is but another example of his willingness to use covert action—specifically to fabricate events—to achieve his objectives in foreign policy.”

By the time Kennedy took office in January of 1961, he had made serious commitments to the Cuban exiles, promising to oppose communism at every opportunity, and supporting the overthrow of Castro. During the campaign, Kennedy had repeatedly accused Eisenhower of not doing enough about Castro.

Eisenhower, Kennedy and other high ranking U.S. officials continually denied any plans to attack Cuba, but as early as October 31, 1960, Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Roa, in an interview at the U.N. General Assembly, was able to provide details on the recruitment and training of the Cuban exiles, whom he referred to as mercenaries and counterrevolutionaries. [The CIA recruits were paid \$400 a month to train, with an additional allotment of \$175 for their wives and more for their children.]

The original plan called for a daytime landing at Trinidad, a city on the southern coast of Cuba near the Escambray Mountains, but Kennedy thought the plan exposed the role of the United States too openly, and favored a nighttime landing at Bay of Pigs, which offered a suitable air-strip on the beach from which bombing raids could be operated. Once the bay was secured, the provisional Cuban government-in-arms set up by the CIA would be landed and immediately recognized by the U.S. The new government would request military support and a new “intervention” would take place.

Bissell states, “It is hard to believe in retrospect that the president and his advisers felt the plans for a large-scale, complicated military operation that had been ongoing for more than a year could be reworked in four days and still offer a high likelihood of success. It is equally amazing that we in the agency agreed so readily.”

A nighttime amphibious landing (which, according to Bissell had only been accomplished successfully once in WWII) diminished the possibility of a mass uprising joining the invading forces, and the new location made retreat into the Escambray Mountains a practical impossibility.

The plan, however, seemed to breed what Néstor T. Carbonell describes in his book, *AND THE RUSSIANS STAYED: THE SOVIETIZATION OF CUBA*, as *infectious optimism*. “Castro’s fledgling air force was to be destroyed prior to the invasion,” he writes. “Enemy troops, trucks, and tanks would not be able to reach the brigade; they would be blasted from the air. To allay any fears of a Castro counteroffensive, the CIA briefer asserted that ‘an umbrella’ above would at all times guard the entire operation against any Castro fighter planes that might remain operational.”

Once Kennedy became aware of the plan, opposition to the invasion was subtly discouraged. Various memos and notes kept from meetings prior to the invasion warned of potential problems and legal ramifications. At a meeting on January 28 the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff spoke strongly against invasion on the grounds that Castro’s forces were already too strong. At the same meeting, the Secretary of Defense estimated that all the covert measures planned against Castro, including propaganda, sabotage, political action and the planned invasion, would not produce “the agreed national goal of overthrowing Castro.”

On March 29 Senator Fulbright gave Kennedy a memo which stated, “To give this activity even covert support is of a piece with the hypocrisy and cynicism for which the United States is constantly denouncing the Soviet Union in the United Nations and elsewhere. This point will not be lost on the rest of the world—nor on our own consciences.”

A three-page memo from Under Secretary of State Chester A. Bowles to Secretary of State Dean Rusk on March 31 argued strongly against the invasion, citing moral and legal grounds.

At a meeting on April 4 in a small conference room at the State Department, Senator Fulbright verbally opposed the plan, as described by Arthur Schlesinger in his book, *A THOUSAND DAYS*: “Fulbright, speaking in an emphatic and incredulous way, denounced the whole idea. The operation, he said, was wildly out of proportion to the threat. It would compromise our moral position in the world and make it impossible for us to protest treaty violations by the Communists. He gave a brave, old-fashioned American speech, honorable, sensible and strong; and he left everyone in the room, except me and perhaps the President, wholly unmoved.”

Five days before D-day, on April 12, Kennedy was asked at a press conference how far the U.S. would go to help an uprising against Castro. He answered: “First, I want to say that there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces. This government will do everything it possibly can, I think it can meet its responsibilities, to make sure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside Cuba. . . The basic issue in Cuba is not one between the United States and Cuba. It is between the Cubans themselves.”

“One further factor no doubt influenced him,” writes Schesinger, “the enormous confidence in his own luck. Everything had broken right for him since 1956. He had won the nomination and the election against all the odds in the book. Everyone around him thought he had the Midas touch and could not lose. Despite himself, even this dispassionate and skeptical man may have been affected by the soaring euphoria of the new day.”

## The Invasion

The counterrevolutionary forces, known as Brigade 2506, were assembled at Retalhuleu, on the west coast of Guatemala, where U.S. engineers had just refurbished the airport especially for the mission. On April 14 six ships sailed from Nicaragua's Puerto Cabezas, cheered on by Nicaraguan president and U.S.-friendly dictator Luis Somoza, who jokingly urged the soldiers to bring him some hairs from Castro's beard.

The Cuban government knew an invasion was coming, but could not guess exactly when or where the attack would take place. When teams of U.S. B-26 bombers began attacking four Cuban airfields simultaneously on Saturday, April 15, the Cubans were prepared. The few planes belonging to the Cuban Air Force were dispersed and camouflaged, with some obsolete, unusable planes left out to fool the attackers and draw the bombs.

As part of the CIA cover story, the attacking B-26 planes were disguised to look as if they were Cuban planes flown by defecting Cuban pilots. An exile Cuban pilot named Mario Zúñiga was presented to the media as a *defector*, and was photographed next to his plane. The photo was published in most of the major papers, but the surprising omission of several serious details, and the overwhelming amount of information already gathered by reporters, helped bring out the truth much sooner than anyone expected.

Prior to the start of the operation, CIA operatives were sent to Cuba. Their job was to aid the invading forces by blowing up key bridges and performing other acts of terrorism that would make it appear that the people of Cuba were joining the invasion. José Basulto was one of those operatives. He flew straight into Havana airport posing as a student from Boston College coming home on vacation.

Shortly after the attack started, Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, at the United Nations, flatly rejected Cuba's Minister of Foreign Affairs Raúl Roa's report of the attack to the assembly, saying that the planes were from the Cuban Air Force and presenting a copy of the photograph published in the newspapers. In the photo, the plane shown has an opaque nose, whereas the model of the B-26 planes used by the Cubans had a plexiglass nose. Stevenson was extremely embarrassed a few hours later when the truth was revealed and he learned that Kennedy had referred to him as "my official liar."

The landing began shortly before midnight on Sunday, April 16, after a team of frogmen went ashore and set up landing lights to guide the operation. The invading force consisted of 1,500 men divided into six battalions, with right-winger and CIA-friendly Manuel Artime as the political chief.

Two battalions came ashore at Playa Girón and one at Playa Larga, but the operation didn't go as smoothly as expected. The razor-sharp coral reefs, identified by U2 spy

photos as seaweed, delayed the landing enough to expose it to air attacks the following morning. Two ships sank about 80 yards from shore, and some heavy equipment was lost.

On Monday, April 17, U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk gave a press conference. "The American people are entitled to know whether we are intervening in Cuba or intend to do so in the future," he said. "The answer to that question is no. What happens in Cuba is for the Cuban people to decide."

Basulto was never told when the invasion would take place. He was surprised to hear the attack had started and didn't have time to get around to blowing up the bridge he'd been assigned. He drove out to Guantanamo and jumped the fence to the U.S. Naval Base.

By 3 a.m. Monday morning Castro knew about the landing, and the Cuban government responded almost immediately, taking a superior position in the air during the early morning hours. They were able to quickly sink the command vessel "Maropa" and the supply ship "Houston."

Once Ambassador Stevenson became aware of the true facts, he was so outraged at being duped that he publicly urged Washington to stop the attack and avoid further embarrassment. Soviet Ambassador Zorin said, "Cuba is not alone today. Among her most sincere friends the Soviet Union is to be found."

At 12:15 Kennedy received a letter from Khrushchev, in which the Soviet leader stated: "It is a secret to no one that the armed bands invading this country were trained, equipped and armed in the United States of America. The planes which are bombing Cuban cities belong to the United States of America, the bombs they are dropping are being supplied by the American Government.

"...It is still not late to avoid the irreparable. The government of the USA still has the possibility of not allowing the flame of war ignited by interventions in Cuba to grow into an incomparable conflagration.

"As far as the Soviet Union is concerned, there should be no mistake about our position: We will render the Cuban people and their government all necessary help to repel an armed attack on Cuba."

The expected supporting air cover by the U.S. Air Force never came. In a political environment full of posturing, threats and confusion, Rusk concluded that additional strikes would tilt international opinion too far and advised Kennedy to back off.

"At about 9:30 p.m. on April 16," describes L. Fletcher Prouty in BAY OF PIGS: THE PIVOTAL OPERATION OF THE JFK ERA, [URL below] "Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President, telephoned the CIA's General C.P. Cabell to inform him that the air strikes the following dawn should not be launched until they could be conducted from a strip within the beachhead."

Prouty, the first "focal Point" officer between the CIA and the Air Force for Clandestine Operations, quotes the report by General Maxwell Taylor, a member of

the Kennedy-appointed Cuban Study Group: "From its inception the plan had been developed under the ground rule that it must retain a covert character, that is, it should include no action which, if revealed, could not be plausibly denied by the United States and should look to the world as an operation exclusively conducted by Cubans. This ground rule meant, among other things, that no U.S. military forces or individuals could take part in combat operations."

## Victory

In a desperate last-ditch effort to support the invasion, a limited air-strike was approved on April 19, but it would not be enough, and four American pilots lost their lives that day. At 2:30 p.m., brigade commander "Pepe" Perez San Roman ordered radio operator Julio Monzon Santos to transmit a final message from brigade 2506. "We have nothing left to fight with," San Roman said, his voice breaking, "how can you people do this to us, our people, our country? Over and out."

Without supplies or air cover, the invading forces fell. To them, the lack of air cover was a direct betrayal. In the end, 200 rebel soldiers were killed, and 1,197 others were captured.

"There's no question that the brigade members were competent, valiant, and committed in their efforts to salvage a rapidly deteriorating situation in a remote area," writes Bissell. "Most of them had no previous professional military training, yet they mounted an amphibious landing and conducted air operations in a manner that was a tribute to their bravery and dedication. They did not receive their due."

"The reality," writes Schesinger, "was that Fidel Castro turned out to be a far more formidable foe and in command of a far better organized regime than anyone had supposed. His patrols spotted the invasion at almost the first possible moment. His planes reacted with speed and vigor. His police eliminated any chance of sabotage or rebellion behind the lines. His soldiers stayed loyal and fought hard. He himself never panicked; and, if faults were chargeable to him, they were his overestimate of the strength of the invasion and undue caution in pressing the ground attack against the beachhead. His performance was impressive."

On April 20 Fidel Castro announced over Havana's Union Radio that "the revolution has been victorious... destroying in less than 72 hours the army the U.S. imperialist government had organized for many months."

"We have always been in danger of direct aggression," said Castro in a speech on April 23, "we have been warning about this in the United Nations: that they would find a pretext, that they would organize some act of aggression so that they could intervene.

"The United States has no right to meddle in our domestic affairs. We do not speak English and we do not chew gum. We have a different tradition, a different culture,

our own way of thinking. We have no borders with anybody. Our frontiers is the sea, very clearly defined.

“How can the crooked politicians and the exploiters have more rights than the people? What right does a rich country have to impose its yoke on our people? Only because they have might and no scruples; they do not respect international rules. They should have been ashamed to be engaged in this battle of Goliath against David—and to lose it besides.”

At the massive May Day celebrations in Havana, less than two weeks after the attack, Castro spoke again about the invasion:

“Humble, honest blood was shed in the struggle against the mercenaries of imperialism. But what blood, what men did imperialism send here to establish that beachhead, to bleed our revolution dry, to destroy our achievements, to burn our cane? [In the account of the invasion published by Castro, it was estimated that the invaders and their families between them once owned a million acres of land, ten thousand houses, seventy factories, ten sugar mills, five mines, and two banks.]

“We can tell the people right here that at the same instant that three of our airports were being bombed, the Yankee agencies were telling the world that our airports had been attacked by planes from our own airforce. They cold-bloodedly bombed our nation and told the world that the bombing was done by Cuban pilots with Cuban planes. This was done with planes on which they painted our insignia.

“If nothing else, this deed should be enough to demonstrate how miserable are the actions of imperialism.”

U.S. involvement in the Bay of Pigs attack was a direct violation of Article 2, paragraph 4 and Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, as well as Articles 18 and 25 of the Charter of the Organization of American States, and Article 1 of the Rio Treaty, which makes armed attacks illegal except in self-defense.

The Act of Bogota, which established the Organization of American States, provides that:

“No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatsoever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. The foregoing principle prohibits not only armed force but also any other form of interference or attempted threat against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements.

“No State may use or encourage the use of coercive measures of an economic or political character in order to force the sovereign will of another state and obtain from it advantages of any kind.

“The territory of a State is inviolable; it may not be the object, even temporarily, of military occupation or of other measures of force taken by another state, directly or indirectly, on any grounds whatsoever...”

The invasion was planned by the U.S. The exile army was recruited, trained, paid, and supplied by the U.S. The planes, boats, tanks and military equipment used was supplied by the U.S. The provisional government was assembled and funded by the U.S. The first on the beach were American frogmen. American pilots were killed in battle. Thomas "Pete" Ray, Riley Shamburger, Leo Francis Baker (who died in a gun battle after crashing) and Wade Gray. Joe Shannon, a Colonel in the Alabama Air National Guard and a surviving pilot, remembers them well, "We had lived with the Cubans for three months, and we were so close to them that their cause became our cause."

On April 20, President Kennedy discussed Cuba before the American Society of Newspaper Editors and continued to deny U.S. involvement. "...This was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator. While we could not be expected to hide our sympathies, we made it repeatedly clear that the armed forces of this country would not intervene in any way.

"But let the record show that our restraint is not inexhaustible... if the nations of this hemisphere should fail to meet their commitments against outside communist penetration—then I want it clearly understood that this government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our nation."

In his book, *COLD WAR AND COUNTER-REVOLUTION: THE FOREIGN POLICY OF JOHN F. KENNEDY*, author Richard J. Walton puts that speech in perspective: "Kennedy did not apologize; rather he issued threats. And he reiterated his amendment to the Monroe doctrine; that Latin American nations were free to choose their own governments, but only as long as they were not communist."

## Aftermath

Mass trials were held for the 1,189 men who were captured, and each was sentenced to 30 years in prison. After twenty months of negotiation, most were released in exchange for \$53 million in food and medicine. (Two men were held for 25 years, Ramon Conte and Ricardo Montenero Duque.)

As a result of the U.S. failure at Bay of Pigs and the diplomatic embarrassment that ensued, President Kennedy fired long-time CIA Director Allen W. Dulles, Deputy Director Charles P. Cabel, and the one principally responsible for the operation, Deputy Director Richard Bissell. Kennedy assumed full responsibility for the failure, although he secretly blamed the CIA and ordered a full investigation of the operation. The report on this investigation, written by CIA inspector general Lyman Kirpatrick, upset the new CIA director John McCone (who replaced Allen W. Dulles) so much that all but one of the 20 copies produced was destroyed, and the report stayed classified until February of 1998.

The controversial inspector general's report concluded that ignorance, incompetence, and arrogance on the part of the CIA was responsible for the fiasco. It criticized nearly every aspect of the CIA's handling of the invasion: misinforming

Kennedy administration officials, planning poorly, using faulty intelligence and conducting an overt military operation beyond "agency responsibility as well as agency capability." The report added that "the agency reduced the exile leaders to the status of puppets."

Aside from being at once a major victory for the Cuban Revolution and a major embarrassment for Kennedy and the CIA, the attack at the Bay of Pigs set the stage for the major confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union: the missile crisis that brought the world to the brink of nuclear war.

In the meantime, perhaps as a result of the Bay of Pigs embarrassment, Kennedy's obsession with eliminating Castro grew. A plan code-named "Operation Mongoose" spurred by Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, attempted to eliminate Castro by any means necessary.

Bissell writes, "To understand the Kennedy administration's obsession with Cuba, it is important to understand the Kennedys, especially Robert. From their perspective, Castro won the first round at the Bay of Pigs. He had defeated the Kennedy team; they were bitter and they could not tolerate his getting away with it. The president and his brother were ready to avenge their personal embarrassment by overthrowing their enemy at any cost. I don't believe there was any significant policy debate in the executive branch on the desirability of getting rid of Castro. Robert Kennedy's involvement in organizing and directing Mongoose became so intense that he might as well have been deputy director for plans for the operation."

An Army memorandum from March 1, 1962 titled, "Possible Actions to Provoke, Harass or Disrupt Cuba," outlines a number of ideas, including Operation Bingo, a plan to fake an attack on the U.S. base at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba that would provide cover for a devastating military assault on Havana. Operation Dirty Trick, in which Castro would be blamed if the 1962 Mercury manned space flight carrying John Glenn crashed, and Operation Good Times, involving faked photos of "an obese Castro" with two voluptuous women in a lavishly furnished room "and a table brimming over with the most delectable Cuban food." The caption would read, "my ration is different."

According to U.S. News & World Report (10/26/98) an estimated 10,000 pages of previously secret documents have been quietly declassified.

Other CIA plots included hiring Mafia hitmen and devising a poisoned scuba suit as a gift for Castro. There is talk in many of the newly released CIA documents of a "Remember the Maine incident" that would facilitate military intervention.

The head of Operation Mongoose, Brigadier General Edward G. Lansdale asked the Joint Chiefs of Staff for their views on these and other top-secret plans to eliminate Castro and/or concoct a pretext for a military invasion of Cuba. Records show that on March 13, 1962, the Joint Chiefs of Staff endorsed these ideas as "suitable for planning purposes." There's no evidence that any of them were carried out.

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## Footnote:

In an interesting turn of events, several of the Bay of Pigs participants went on to take starring roles in Richard Nixon's Watergate affair, including **E. Howard Hunt, Jr.**, the CIA operator who supervised the planning and execution of the invasion with Frank Bender (**real name**). Three other Cubans, graduates of the Bay of Pigs, were arrested at the Watergate break-in: Eugenio R. Martínez, Virgilio Gonzáles, and Bernard L. Barker. Manuel Artime, who was the "political chief" of the Bay of Pigs invasion, organized the Miami Watergate Defense Relief Fund and collected \$21,000 which went to the convicted burglars.

**Jose Basulto**, the CIA operative stranded in Havana, went on to participate in over three decades of Cold War against Cuba. His exploits included the firing of 20mm. Cannon shells into a coastal Cuban hotel thought to house Eastern Block advisors in 1962. In the 1980's, Basulto trained CIA-backed death squads in El Salvador, Guatemala, Uruguay, Paraguay and other South American countries. According to recently released government documents, this was all part of "Operation Condor," a systematic multinational counterintelligence network which torture-murdered thousands of intellectuals and civilians suspected of leftist activities.

In 1991 Basulto was one of the founders of Brothers To The Rescue (BTTR), a search and rescue operation out of Florida with a 1.5 million dollar yearly budget. It was Basulto's plane that violated Cuban air space three times on February 24, 1996. Cuban MiGs followed and shot down the other two planes in Basulto's company.

**Grayson L. Lynch**, the CIA agent who fired the first shot of the assault and took unofficial command of the doomed force, admitted in July of 1998 that after Bay of Pigs and up until 1967, he directed 2,126 clandestine CIA assaults on Cuba out of Miami, directly participating in 113 of them. In his book, **DECISION FOR DISASTER: BETRAYAL AT THE BAY OF PIGS**, Lynch blames Kennedy for canceling the air attacks in fear of widening U.S. involvement.

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