

# SIR!

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## TRAGEDY AT THE BAY OF PIGS

The true story behind the 72 hours preceding the Bay of Pigs disaster—which saw 1200 brave Cuban patriots thrown into Castro dungeons

By JAMES SHAFFER



Jose Cardona Jr., son of head of Revolutionary Council in U.S., invaded Cuba with forces through the Bay of Pigs.

● ● “What happened?”

“We’re aground,” the barge pilot shouted, frantically regaining his feet, seizing the controls and cutting the engines.

The troop commander picked himself up from the open aft pilot deck of the small LCM, resecured his Garand rifle to his shoulder, and glanced at his watch. His face twisted into a bitter mask, he peered down into the cargo hold of the LCM. His entire company of 91 men was scattered like match sticks across the slippery plate deck. There was the sound of cursing, the clatter of rifles and equipment.

“Don’t be alarmed,” the troop commander shouted in an assured voice. “Pick yourselves up and secure your gear.”

But the assurance in the commander’s voice was not reflected in his silent calculations. They were aground fifteen minutes too early. And fifteen minutes deviation in a beach landing was dangerous.

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Castro men fire heavy artillery at patriots. Invasion was supposed to catch Castro off guard, but he was ready for it.

The commander continued to watch his men in concern. They were now picking themselves up. All were green troops, not one had ever witnessed combat. Eight months ago they had touched a rifle for the first time. He alone, in the entire company, was the only man who had ever tasted battle.

The time of this incident was just before dawn on Monday, April 17th, 1961. The place was the Bahia de Cochinos (Bay of Pigs), which forms the geographical heel of the Cienega de Zapata (Swamp of the Shoe), some 90 miles below Havana on Cuba's barren southern coast.

The LCM with its cargo of 91 men under the command of Captain Ricardo Santana was one of three such barges making their way toward the crystal sand beaches of the obscure bay. Their mission, the culmination of some ten months of planning, was to invade and trigger a spontaneous popular uprising which would bring the downfall of the Communistic and tyrannical regime of Fidel Castro.

Captain Santana was an early defector from Castro's regime, having fought with the bearded rebel in the fabled Sierra Maestra for two years. Now he was one of the few battle-seasoned men in the counterrevolutionary operation.

He stood braced against the pilot rail of the LCM, wearing unmarked green fatigues, unshaven for three days, and deeply concerned with the sudden deviation from the landing schedule. He watched his men reassemble in the hold, somewhat shaken by the sudden collision.

"Can you see land?" Santana asked the barge pilot, wondering if the pilot's eyes could penetrate the darkness better than his own.

"No," was the reply.

"We aren't supposed to beach for another fifteen minutes," Santana said.

"I know, sir," the barge pilot answered. "But we've either hit a sandbar or the tide is extremely low."

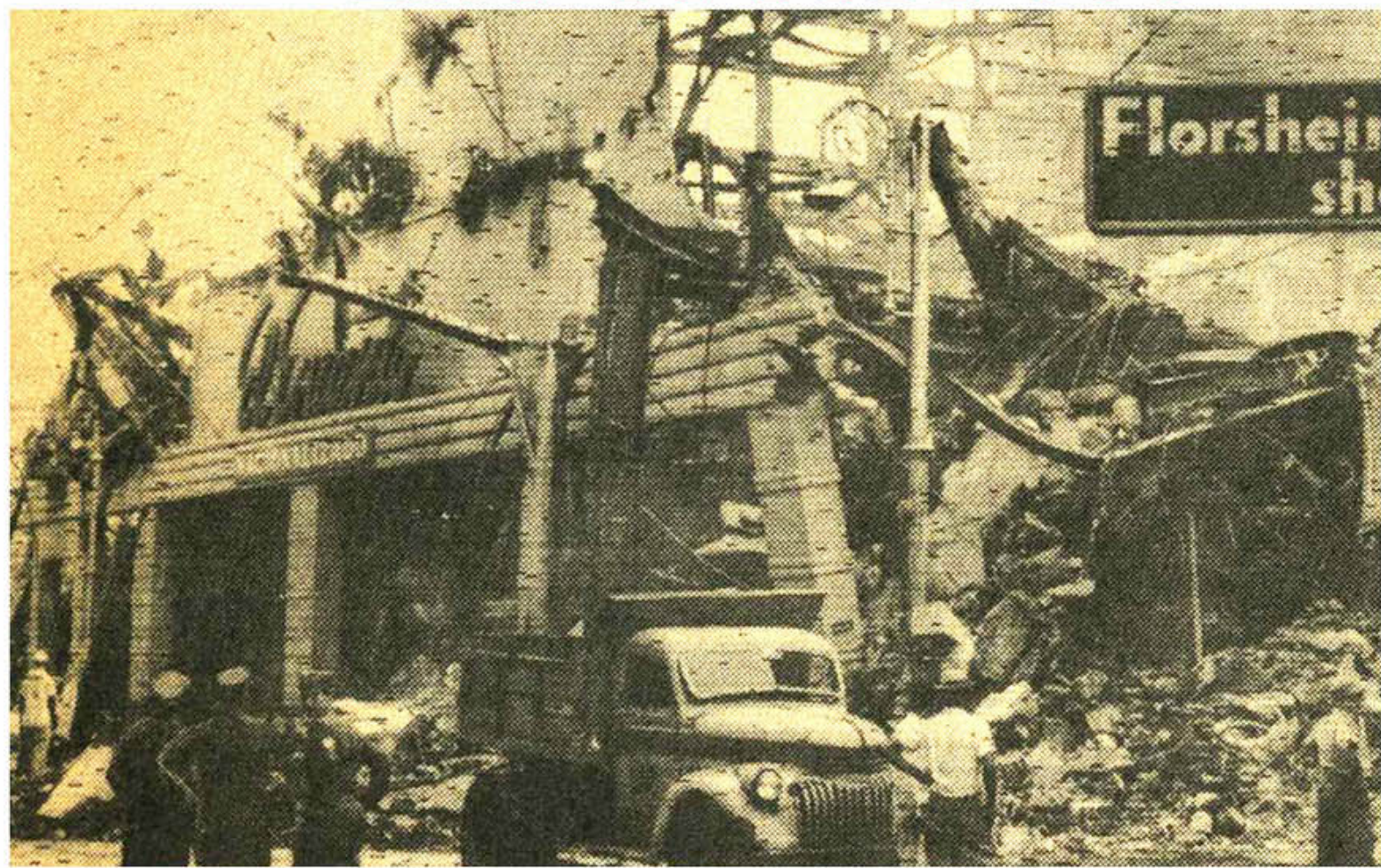
The undercurrent of the ebb tide caught the LCM and gently heaved it back, setting it afloat. Again the troops in the hold were jostled, some falling for the second time. Santana held firm to the deck rail. The barge pilot struggled with the prop and rudder to bring the LCM under control. He gunned the inboard engines and drove the 90-ton vessel hard aground.

Captain Santana frowned at his watch, stared out into



Cuban women in Miami kneel in prayer for loved ones lost in the disastrous April 1961 invasion of Cuban mainland.

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**Fire that gutted nationalized department store El Encanto was biggest single act of sabotage since Castro took over.**

the mask of predawn blackness for a vision of nonexistent land, then down into the hold at his anxious company of troops. He realized he had to make a decision.

"Lower the ramp," he barked to the barge pilot.

The pilot pulled the release throttle, and there was a grinding noise of chains and gears, but the bow ramp didn't budge. The pilot cursed, struggled with the stubborn throttle, but there was only the feeble noise of gears and chains.

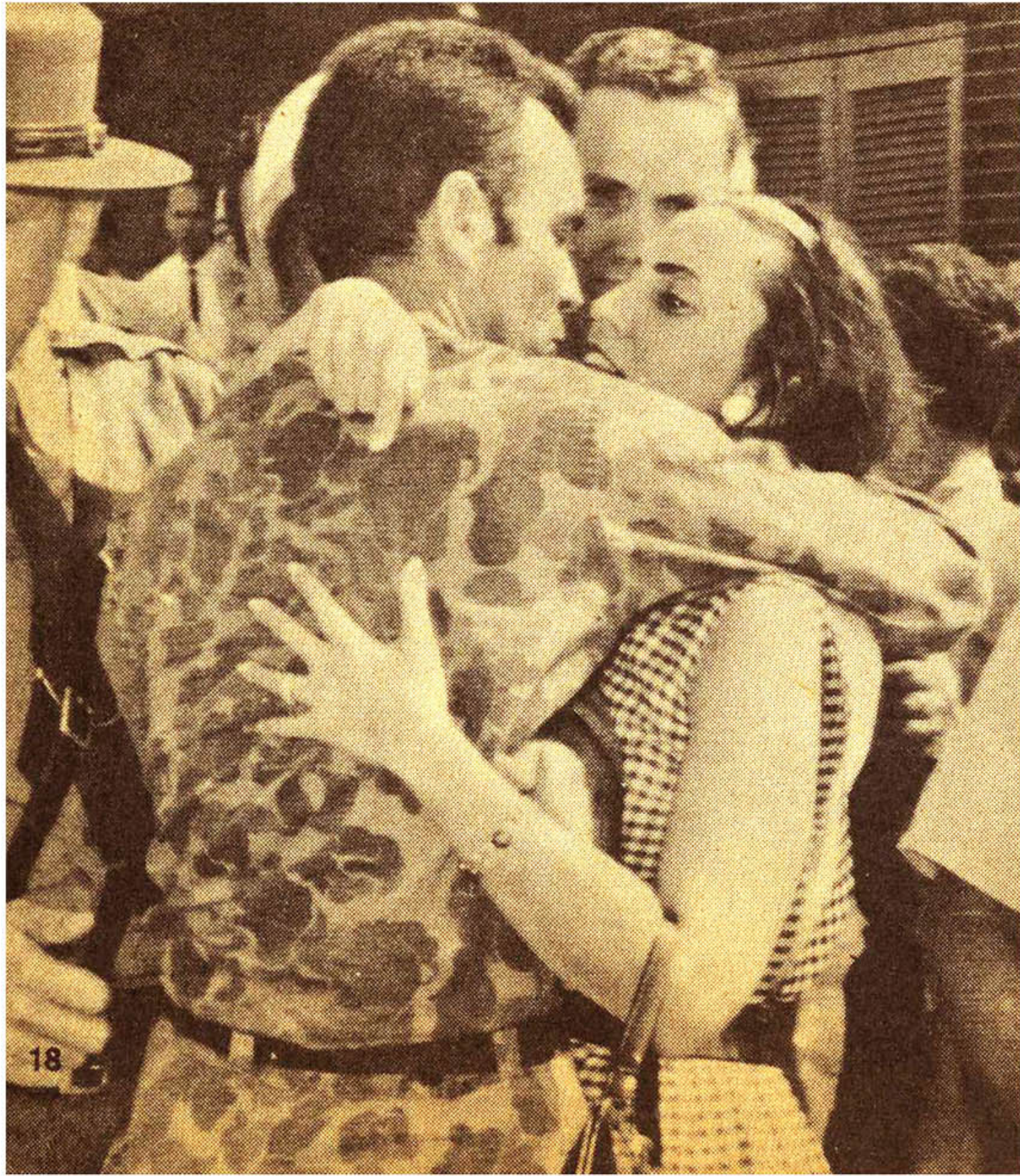
"It's stuck," the pilot muttered.

A concerned murmur rose from the troops in the hold as they waited. Captain Santana silently despaired at the sudden twist of unscheduled events.

The pilot rocked the barge firm against the bottom, then picked his way forward along the port catwalk. He spent some five minutes probing into the port gear box while a soldier held a flashlight, which was strictly against security regulations. Then the pilot inspected the starboard gear box. He returned to the pilot deck harried and nervous, pulled the release throttle, the chains and gears again clanked, and then the ramp moved with a heavy metallic grunt. Halfway down it halted. The pilot cursed, fumbled with the controls, and finally the ramp moved, dropping to the horizontal open level.

"Move out," shouted Santana to the 91 men clustered in the hold.

Hesitantly the two lead sergeants on each side of the



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**Ulises Carbo, spokesman for 1000 Cuban rebel prisoners, gets big hug from unidentified woman in Miami. Castro's deal to swap the prisoners for 500 tractors fell through.**

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LCM plunged into the salty water. It was deep; the one on the port side went in over his head and came up swimming and without a rifle.

"Move out," Santana repeated angrily to the hesitant men.

Then, in double file procession, the company vacated the LCM, tumbling from the sides of the ramp into deep water and struggling forward toward invisible land.

Captain Santana was the last to clear the LCM, and like many of the rest, went in over his head. It was impossible to keep his rifle dry.

Dawn edged out of the east some five minutes after Santana cleared the LCM. He made out the beach through salt-burned eyes, still 1,000 yards away, and knew they had been dumped too far offshore.

It was an exhausting struggle through the shoulder-deep water. The footing was loose sinking sand, rifles had to be carried overhead and became like lead weights, and the strong ebb tide undercurrent was like wading against molasses. The men fell, struggled, and cursed in the pre-dawn darkness.

The most discouraging phase was yet to come. The entire landing had been planned in the utmost secrecy and theoretically was to be unopposed. Castro's forces were thought to be in complete ignorance of the operation. It was to carry the element of total *(Continued on page 54)* surprise when it finally occurred.

When the struggling company reached a ragged formation on wet sand at the edge of the beach, the piercing shrill echo of an aircraft engine droned overhead. It was moving somewhere above them in



Field commander of the rebel troops that invaded Cuba, Alfredo Perez San Roman was captured by Castro soldiers.

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the murky dawn and the hiss of the engine was unmistakable—a jet. Only Castro's air force had jets, Russian MIG's.

Instantly Captain Santana knew the element of surprise was lost. Somewhere in the vast web of operational security there had been a leak. Castro knew of the invasion.

Once ashore, it took Captain Santana some 30 minutes to organize his wet, exhausted company. Despite the loss of two men to the sea, the brutal trek through 1½ miles of undercurrent, and the wet, demoralized condition of the troops, he succeeded in restoring order. Even the occasional piercing drone of the MIG overhead lost its terrifying sensation.

Santana made the men check and clean their rifles, regrouped each platoon, then held a staff conference. Using his index finger as a pencil in the wet sand, he detailed their course.

"We will move individually in platoons. The beach here is 3 miles wide. Able platoon will take the inland flank against the swamp. The swamp is deserted. Baker platoon will move up the middle. I will personally take Charley platoon along the shore. We must be in Jaguey Grande by noon to meet the airborne drop."

The captain's words were cut off by the descending hiss of a MIG. Then the loud, unmistakable staccato of machine gun fire echoed across the Bay of Pigs.

"Take cover," Santana shouted as a splash of .45 caliber shells pelleted the soft sand.

The others didn't see the MIG as it descended out of the inky dawn; they never saw it. They knew of its presence only by the telltale ghostly whine of the engine and the little fragments of metallic death it spit on the beach.

Captain Santana was one of the victims, a bullet piercing his brain with instant death. With him seemed to go any semblance of organization in his company. Disaster seemed to have stalked the operation from the start.

The fiasco at the Bay of Pigs, as it has become known to the world, began ten months earlier on a hot June morning in room 125 of the plush Commodore Hotel in midtown Manhattan. It was born in the classical fashion of cloak-and-dagger intrigue. Five prominent former residents of Cuba, all anti-Castro and untainted by former dictator Batista, were instructed to arrive at the Commodore separately. There they were confronted by Roy Bender, a high-ranking agent of the renowned CIA (U.S.'s Central Intelligence Agency). Bender explained that the U.S.



Pix smuggled into Miami by Cuban courier known as Henry shows rebel Major Evelio Duque (1) greeting Capt. Ramon Perez at guerrilla HQ in hills 3 months prior to invasion.

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Grim-faced patriots, captured in invasion, are marched to prison. An estimated 1200 were taken prisoner by Castro.

officially but secretly was prepared to do everything possible to restore freedom and liberty to Cuba.

The five prominent Cubans formed the Frente Democrático Revolucionario (Democratic Revolutionary Front), and Dr. Antonio de Varona, Cuban premier before Batista, was named head. Two weeks later the Frente released a charter in Mexico City declaring the democratic principles of its belief.

After formation of the Frente operations moved swiftly. With clandestine U.S. support, active recruiting took place among the 100,000 Cuban exiles clustered in the Miami area. A staging and induction station was set up at a former U.S. Marine air base at Opa-Locka, just outside Miami. Quietly the deserted weed-choked base was turned into a hive of activity, some 1500 men passing through its guarded mesh-wire gate under the cover of nighttime darkness.

Their destination had been carefully pre-arranged and planned. In the small, friendly republic of Guatemala, some five hours from Miami by air, six training camps were organized. They were the donation of Roberto Alejos, a wealthy rancher-businessman, and included the use of his coffee farm and cotton plantation. A nearby air base was utilized. The small field at Retalhuleu was given a \$1,000,000 four-week face lifting to accommodate larger craft. The six training camps were directed by U.S. military personnel who commanded under other names. Intensive six-month training in all phases of warfare was given to the raw recruits, including air-drop instruction.

The utmost secrecy was maintained to conceal the operation. Only once were de Varona and a personal aide allowed to visit the Guatemala camps. When curious reporters got wind of military activity at the Helvetia coffee farm, the troops were removed to another camp and the reporters invited in. They found nothing.

But leaks in security somehow developed. Castro's Communist government learned of the training camps and even acquired a documentary film as visual proof.

While military preparations in Guatemala proceeded smoothly, political complications developed in the U.S.

In December of 1960 a soft-spoken civil engineer named Manolo Rey appeared on the scene in Miami. He was fresh from Havana via an underground escape route and wanted by Castro's secret police (the DIER).

Manolo Rey, one-time hero of Castro's revolution, former leader of the important

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Havana underground, and the new regime's first Minister of Public Works, had deserted the cause, gone underground, organized the People's Revolutionary Movement (MRP), and was finally forced to flee the island.

MRP and Manolo Rey immediately came to the attention of CIA. They wanted to add their support to the liberation movement. Rey offered the use of his 10,000 devoted members scattered in 128 Cuban communities. They would be invaluable in sabotage and guerrilla activity, Rey declared.

Frente was reluctant to accept MRP. The two political factions had opposite views on the destiny of Cuba. Frente regarded MRP as too close to Communist Castro, too late to desert and too inexperienced. MRP and Rey charged the Frente was a return to the old regime in opposing land reform.

The two organizations refused to recognize each other. For a long time, as the two bickered politically, CIA curbed direct support to MRP. It finally sanctioned MRP when convinced Rey was sincere in his efforts to free Cuba.

When recognition of MRP was established, cloak and dagger forays were made to send arms and munitions to the Cuban underground. Most of the attempts ended in failure. One abortive air drop at Cardenas was miscued when the pilot confused village street lights for those of signaling auto lights. A barge set out from Miami with 8 tons of arms and ammo, but the entire cargo was dumped when a passing freighter was mistaken for a Cuban gunboat. The few other attempts at arms infiltration were equally mishandled.

Political bickering continued between MRP and Frente. It soon became apparent to CIA that unless a solid front was presented, the operation would be an uphill struggle.

Finally, following three unsuccessful attempts, in February of 1961 at the Miami Skyways Motel a united front was achieved. A Revolutionary Council was formed, with Jose Mira Cardona as Council president. Cardona, a former Havana criminal lawyer who fled Batista, was Castro's first premier. He resigned after serving 39 days in the puppet regime.

Strife continued to plague the operation even after all the Cuban political factions were welded. Animosity developed between CIA and the Army of Liberation. The Cuban military leaders became provoked because U.S. military advisers had final command. They complained about the red tape involved in getting supplies and arms, and they were extremely bitter when some ex-Batista officers infiltrated the ranks.

One liberation officer complained to CIA: "You now own us and are no longer our allies."

Manuel Artime, a boyish-appearing 28-year-old former Havana University student emerged as commander of the Army of Liberation. He had no previous combat experience, but CIA gave him the nod over volunteers who did.

Then, a final explosive issue split the operation. In March the Army of Liberation became 9 months old. It had matured and seasoned in the six hidden camps in Guatemala and was primed for action. A decision had to be made when to move. The Revolutionary Council, including Cardona, de Varona and Rey, wanted to wait until June. CIA and military strategists

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from the Pentagon believed the time was ripe, that the longer delay was enforced, the stronger entrenched Castro would become. Several violent conferences were held, CIA and the Revolutionary Council differing bitterly as to the time of invasion. Only Manuel Artime of the Cuban leaders agreed with CIA. The decision was finally enforced to move at once, and Pentagon military planners picked the exact date and target area.

Invasion debarkation areas were set up at the U.S. naval base on Swan Island and Puerto Cabezas on the remote northern coast of Nicaragua. Through earlier private negotiations, Nicaragua had granted the temporary use of Puerto Cabezas.

U.S. C-54 transports air-lifted 50 carloads of arms, munitions and supplies to Swan Island and Puerto Cabezas. A fleet of eight assorted, unmarked and refitted vessels put out from New Orleans, and the troops in Guatemala were air-lifted to the advance jump-off bases.

Jose Miro Cardona and his Revolutionary Council were assembled secretly in Miami in preparation for the glorious return to Cuba the instant some soil had been liberated.

Forty-eight hours prior to actual troop debarkations, twelve unmarked, drab gray, reconditioned B-26 bombers took off from Retalhuleu. The bombers had been assigned specific targets—four military airfields in Cuba. They were to neutralize Castro's air arm by destroying the military airports at Havana (Camp Libertad), Santiago, San Julian in Pinar del Rio, and San Antonio de los Banos (near Havana).

The world first learned that trouble was brewing in Cuba when a maze of confused reports funneled out of the island telling of these four air strikes. Initially these raids were purported to have been defectors from the Cuban Air Force who kidnaped the B-26's from Cuban fields, dropped their bombs, then fled.

In realistic decoy fashion one B-26 landed limply at Miami's International Airport with some testimonial bullets in the fuselage. The pilot proudly announced he had apprehended the plane, bombed Libertad, and then fled. However, a reporter found that the plane's machine guns hadn't been fired in years and the bomb bay doors were corroded with rust.

**CAPTAIN RAMON AZOR**, a former commercial pilot for Cubana Airlines, led the strike against Havana's Camp Libertad. It was still dark when his group of four B-26's, identified as "the Libertad squadron," roared away from the field at Retalhuleu. There were two men in each craft. Alberto Diaz was Azor's co-pilot, navigator and bombardier. Diaz, a youthful former law student had eight months of B-26 training prior to the mission.

About two hours out, one B-26 developed engine trouble and broke radio silence requesting instructions. Azor ordered the stricken plane back to Retalhuleu. It was ditched thirty minutes later, the crew being rescued from their life raft by a U.S. Navy seaplane.

The remaining squadron skirted the Cuban mainland and approached Havana from the northern Gulf. It was almost a four-hour trip, and the Havana coastline became visible through the clear dawn at 6:15 a.m.

"There it is," Azor muttered, recognizing the Bay of Havana and the city as it sprawled over the yellow clay hills that



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reached against the blue sea. It was a nostalgic sight.

"Like an old friend," Diaz reflected. "It seems so cruel to attack."

"We had better lose altitude," Azor noted.

Quickly the B-26 lost altitude. As the plane moved in from the ocean over the city, certain landmarks became visible.

"There's the old law building at the University," Diaz commented.

"Everything is still asleep," Azor observed.

In a matter of moments the unmarked B-26 was approaching Libertad on the western edge of the sleeping city.

"That's Libertad," Azor said, looking at the open trapezoid-shaped area in the heart of the residential suburb of Miramar. "Better open the bomb bay doors."

Diaz pushed the control throttle and the two giant belly doors sagged open. Dead ahead lay the military base. Azor scanned it methodically. Six fighter planes, World War II U.S. Mustangs, were lined up on the edge of a take-off apron. Sand-bagged anti-aircraft emplacements were distinctly visible in a ring around the base. Even the battery crews in the pits were discernible; little men appearing like ants clustered inside a mound of sand.

"There is our first target," Azor pointed, cataloguing the six Mustangs lined up on the take-off apron and ready for flight.

Breaking radio silence, Azor commanded: "Libertad 2, this is Libertad 1, going in at 2000 feet. Six Mustangs first objective. If I miss, you finish."

Libertad 2, some 3 miles away, acknowledged the message.

Azor set the B-26 in a dead run toward the fighter assembly. His sudden tense concern was mirrored in the icy tone of his voice. "You're in command," he snapped to Diaz.

The co-pilot bent over the complicated bombsight controls at his right front and began fingering the many dials and instruments.

"Right 2 degrees," Diaz prompted as he stared down through the aperture and into the lens with its hairline graduations.

Azor altered the flight of the plane slightly to the right. He couldn't resist looking down at the field before him. From his vantage point he could see everything, and was quick to observe that the anti-aircraft crews were suddenly aware of the strange unmarked plane overhead. He cringed when he saw one gun, a Czech ZPU-4, suddenly elevate its four menacing barrels into the air and begin to trace his flight.

"Cut elevation 100 feet," Diaz ordered.

Azor sent the B-26 into a sharp dip.

"Level off," was the excited counter.

The plane nosed back to an even path. The six fighters were now directly in front of and below them, and Azor could see the pilots rushing out, apparently intent on getting into the air.

"Steady—steady," Diaz guided. Then, after a deep breath: "Now!" He pressed the bomb release lever.

There was a slight lurch as four contact-fuse 500-pounders were disgorged. The B-26 moved quickly over and away from the parked Mustangs.

In seconds there was the explosive series of 500-pounders. Azor and Diaz glanced back in concern, but could discern little except sudden violent clouds of white smoke.

"We must have been right on top of them," Diaz said hopefully.

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The B-26 had climbed and maneuvered some 30 seconds before the unmistakable ack-ack-ack of the four-barrel ZPU-4's pursued. Immediately, all around the B-26 quick, violent little puffs of white smoke burst like angry popcorn balls.

"Our homecoming," Azor murmured.

The white clouds of bomb smoke had now cleared from the fighter formation. Two of the planes had been hit and were violently spitting flames and black smoke. Several of the pilots lay injured, and the others seemed to run around, bewildered. A third plane appeared to have been hit.

"Libertad 2, this is Libertad 1," Azor radioed. "Follow our strike."

Azor and Diaz watched as Libertad 2 approached, carpeted by the angry little popcorn puffs.

"That ack-ack is uncomfortably close," Azor observed.

**I**n less than a minute Libertad 1 had moved beyond the range of the ZPU-4's. Azor basked sharply to the right to circle back for the second release. The two men in Libertad 1 anxiously followed Libertad 2 as she made her run.

"She's drawing much more ack-ack," Azor frowned as the popcorn puffs danced all around her.

Then Libertad 2 dipped to begin the release run on the fighter formation.

"She's much too low," Azor said tensely. Quickly he pressed his radio switch and said excitedly: "Libertad 2, you are much too low, much too low. Get the hell up another 500 feet." Then he froze and screamed: "Watch out!"

His advice was too late. ZPU-4 fire caught her right engine, which instantly burst into a violent sheet of flame. The plane faltered, her flight path drifted, and a few seconds later when the four 500-pounders were released, she was wide from her target. The bombs harmlessly pelted the runway. A long trail of thick black smoke drifted from the right engine as Libertad 2 tried to gain altitude and speed. The ack-ack fire framed her mercilessly and another burst caught her tail assembly.

"Make for the ocean," Azor said tensely as he watched the wounded craft limping away. He wasn't even sure he was being received.

Libertad 2 fluttered, smoking, out to sea, and five minutes later went down when her fuel tanks exploded. She dropped in pieces into the blue Gulf. Her crew didn't survive.

Roaring in barely seconds after Libertad 2 had made her tragic run, Libertad 3 caught the anti-aircraft batteries off balance. Dipping to 1700 feet, a perfect release of her four missiles plummeted across the Mustang formation, gushing staccatos of noisy smoke. Libertad 3 basked sharply to the left to confuse the ZPU-4's and soared inland to circle for a second release.

When the smoke had cleared, two more Mustangs were bleeding fire. A third had been overturned by concussion, her wings broken. Only one fighter remained.

"Going in on the last run," Azor radioed to Libertad 3. "Follow us. Secondary target is objective."

The secondary target was a high, corrugated sheet hangar that had been converted to a munitions arsenal. It was the largest building on the base, with a drab cream-colored arched roof. MRP intelligence had found out it was being used as a munitions depot.

Azor dropped in over the warehouse,

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trailing a jagged white tail of evil popcorn puffs. The bombsight mechanism was damaged by close concussion, and Azor made the release by sight.

The four bombs were dropped a little prematurely and two exploded harmlessly in front of the converted hangar. The other two were on target. Immediately following their contact explosion, a thunderous blast echoed from inside the hangar. Part of the roof was peeled back like the lid of a sardine can. More blasts rocked the structure, and huge billows of smoke splintered the clear morning.

Fleeing Libertad 1 now drew fire from every ZPU-4 battery on the base. Even small arms fire was directed at her—rifles and machine guns—despite their uselessness.

One ack-ack shell caught the bomber in the midsection. The blast rocked the plane, shaking it violently. Stunned, Diaz ran back to see a large gaping hole in the body fuselage. Fortunately the engines and controls were still intact. Libertad 1 limped desperately away and was ditched 45 minutes later near Boca Chica in the Florida Keys. A U.S. Coast Guard cutter from Key West picked up Azor and Diaz in a rubber raft.

Libertad 3 placed her last stick of bombs on an aircraft hangar from the comparatively safe altitude of 4000 feet, observed the munitions arsenal burn and explode violently for a few seconds, then headed toward a friendly haven to the north.

Of the four air strikes at Castro's military bases, only the one at Libertad was a success. The strike at San Julian was in vain; there were no military craft there. The one at San Antonio de los Banos was thwarted by heavy antiaircraft fire, one B-26 being downed. Four MIG jets got off the ground and destroyed the other bomber. A fleet of MIG's on the ground was unscathed. The long strike to Santiago got off course, arrived late, and was viciously beaten off by Mustangs and ack-ack after damaging a hangar and fuel tanks.

Of the twelve B-26's that set out from Retalhuleu, only five returned to land. The calculated air strike did not paralyze Castro's air arm.

Despite the lack of success of the B-26 raids, the amphibious invasion was triggered forty-eight hours later. As the Army of Liberation debarked from the staging areas at Swan Island and Puerto Cabezas, a provocative, coded message of lofty, aesthetic phrases was beamed from the flagship, the *Atlantico*, a refitted motorship. The message, with the tape-recorded voice of Manuel Artime, commander of the Army of Liberation, carried this mysterious text:

Alert, alert! Look well at the rainbow. The first will rise very soon. Chico is in the house. Visit him. The sky is blue. Place notice in the tree. The tree is green and brown. The letters arrived well. The fish will not take much time to rise. The fish is red. Look well at the rainbow. . . .

In the darkness of predawn on Monday, April 17th, the invasion fleet, eight drab-gray vessels, assembled off the Bay of Pigs. Three puggy World War II LCM's were the spearhead of the operation, beaching separately along the shore and disgorging their cargoes. As the initial troops moved ashore, the expected element of surprise vanished. The overhead scream of MIG jets signaled the awareness of the enemy. And when the

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powerful MIG's darted down out of the darkness and spit their memos of death on the beach, the Army of Liberation shed its first blood. One of the first casualties was Captain Santana, commander of the company which went ashore at LaPlaya Maquina.

**W**HEN dawn broke and the Caribbean sun disclosed the bay, the Army of Liberation dropped 85 paratroopers from a C-124 Globemaster. They were supposed to have been dumped on Jaguey Grande, a town and sugar mill some 30 miles inland from the Bay of Pigs.

Jaguey Grande was a key piece of geography for the invaders. It stood at the top of a narrow corridor that sliced through Zapata swamp. The corridor contained a rail and dirt roadbed, and Jaguey Grande was the terminal head. Near the sugar mill was a small airfield that was to serve as the base for the Army of Liberation's air force. It was imperative that the Army of Liberation control Jaguey Grande.

The air drop was only partially successful. About half of the paratroopers were strewn in the wilds of the Zapata to the east of the sugar mill. The other half succeeded in securing the town and airfield and dug in to wait for the arrival of the supporting amphibious troops who were coming up the swamp-lined corridor.

Barely an hour after seizing the airfield, a twin-engine Aeronica loaded with small arms attempted to land. The surface of the neglected airfield was so rough, the Aeronica crashed when it hit soft ground. Use of the field was abandoned.

During the early morning three B-26's from Swan Island attempted to act as a protective umbrella for the invasion fleet and assault troops. But they were met by some twelve MIG's from San Antonio de los Banos, who attacked the individual B-26's in packs of four. The outmoded bombers were no match for the swift, powerful MIG's. By noon the air umbrella of the Army of Liberation had been destroyed.

Then the MIG's turned on the invasion fleet idling off the bay. The first ship to go down was the flagship *Atlantico*, and with it went control of the operation. Two LCM's and one refitted trawler were subsequently destroyed and beached. The lack of air control over the bay was fatal to the Army of Liberation.

The ground troops, who had hoped to reach Jaguey Grande the first day and link up with the airborne drop, were harassed and at times completely halted by the vicious machine gun fire of the MIG's.

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Time and time again, as they moved up the rail track and dirt road, they were sent fleeing into the mosquito-infested swamp for cover. They had nothing with which to combat the deadly MIG's.

The outside world waited tensely for news of the invasion. The actual developments were clouded by a web of confused rumors and fragmentary reports. Announcements had the Army of Liberation attacking five places in Cuba—the Bay of Pigs, Santa Clara, Baracoa, Pinar del Rio and Cienfuegos. The Isle of Pines was supposed to have been overrun and 10,000 political inmates at Nueva Gerona prison released and armed. Still more flagrant stories carried the news that Fidel Castro had been wounded, his brother Raul captured, and Communist czar Che Guevara was a suicide. Unfortunately, none of these wild tales were true.

During the second day Castro marshaled a trained force of 5,000 regulars and some 5,000 more militiamen at Jaguey Grande. Assaulted by heavy artillery and giant, impregnable Russian T-34 tanks, the paratroopers who held the key town were easily overrun. Forty of the paratroopers were killed defending the airfield. The remainder were surrounded in the grinding mill of the near-by sugar plantation and forced to surrender.

Then, behind the cover of T-34 tanks, the overhead support of the MIG's and the harassment of long-range artillery, the Castro regulars moved down the narrow rail and road corridor, steam rolling the Army of Liberation before them.

Time and time again the Army of Liberation tried to set up a defense position in the narrow passageway, but it was a hopeless task. T-34's and MIG's were too much for infantry, mortars and light howitzers. They retreated stubbornly, inch by inch, and were reported to have taken some 2,000 lives in their efforts.

By midmorning of the third day the situation was entirely hopeless for the invaders. They had been pushed down the corridor and back onto the beach and were now positioned on the exposed, defenseless sands of the bay.

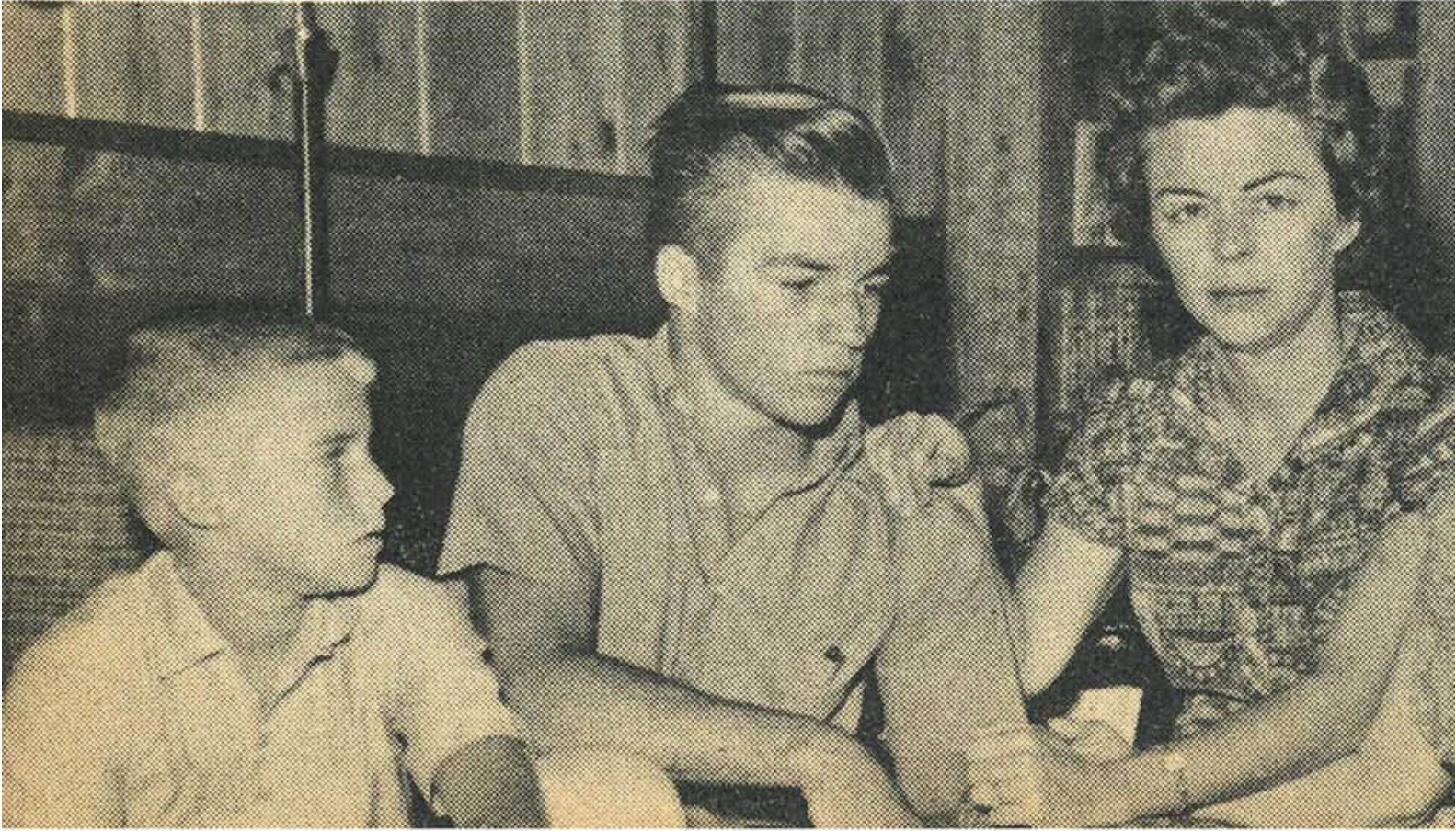
Realizing the finality of the situation, the temporary commander of the Army of Liberation issued the order: "Every man for himself." With that, all semblance of organized resistance ended.

Making a last-ditch defense in the sand bars and beach weeds of La Playa Giron, a force of some 50 beleaguered defenders protected 200 men who succeeded in fleeing via small boats to a motor ship offshore. The motor ship limped away under a hail of MIG machine gun fire.

Captain Manuel Penabaz, one of the 50 final defenders at La Playa Giron, secured a pontoon raft, paddled out into the sea amid a hail of rifle fire, and spent six days afloat. Sharks nibbled at his oars and surfaced to bite at his raft. He blistered badly under the torrid sun and went waterless and hungry for 124 hours before a freighter picked his exhausted body out of the sea and brought him to Corpus Christi, Texas.

Realizing the futile situation, the stunned Revolutionary Council in Miami issued a final communique, which only thinly attempted to gloss over the facts. The communique admitted that the operation had not been a complete success.

Late in the afternoon of the third day a ragged band of invaders trapped in a thicket on the shore of Laguna del Tesoro,

**BAY OF PIGS . . .**

**Family of U.S. businessman Howard Anderson who was shot by Castro firing squad.**

a small lake inland from the bay, capitulated. Two T-34 tanks rumbled into the thicket blazing 65mm cannon, and the beleaguered troops succumbed. With their collapse, the Army of Liberation ceased to exist. Some 1200 invaders had been taken prisoner, and it's probable that only a brave handful disappeared into the brutal Zapata, hoping to reach the Sierra Escambray.

It had been a tragic and disastrous seventy-two hours for the Army of Liberation at the Bay of Pigs. They had fought courageously, but being badly outnumbered and completely outequipped, they quickly melted.

The spirit of the venture was underscored by some nameless commander when, during the last twelve hours on the beach, he was asked by radio from an offshore vessel if he wished to be evacuated. "I will never leave this island," was his reply.

Even now, at the publication of this story, the liberation of Cuba continues. Groups are reorganizing, plans are being sketched, and the final, decisive struggle for freedom in Cuba is far from over.

# **SIR!**