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Widows Dispute Story On Bay of Pigs Fatalities

NASHVILLE, Tenn., Mar. 4 (AP)—When four Birmingham (Ala.) airmen failed to return from the 1961 invasion of Cuba, reports indicated they were soldiers of fortune. But their widows reject this.

"These men knew what they were getting into," said attorney Alex E. Carlson, who reported the disappearance to the wives. "It was a calculated risk. If they came back they had a nice nest egg."

The women each get \$225 every two weeks—apparently tax free—from an unknown benefactor. But they insist money alone was not their husband's motives.

"My husband was no soldier of fortune or adventurer," said Mrs. Thomas Willard Ray in an interview with Nashville Tennessean Reporter Wayne Whitt.

Interviewed Widows

Mr. Whitt also talked with Mrs. Wade C. Gray and Mrs. Riley W. Shamburger, Jr., the other two widows who live in the Birmingham area. The fourth widow, Mrs. Lee P. Baker, now lives in suburban Los Angeles with her father and stepmother.

In Washington, an official of the Central Intelligence Agency declined comment on the widows' remarks and reports that the four men had worked for the agency. The official noted that the CIA has a general policy of silence regarding the Bay of Pigs invasion.

The money the widows receive comes from the Bankers Trust Co. of New York. Two attorneys, Mr. Carlson, who lives in Miami Spring, Fla., and Thomas F. McDowell of Birmingham, have told them the payments will continue until they marry again.

The widows say they have not been told the identity of the account against which the checks are drawn. Bank officials sign the checks.

Recruited in January

The women say their husbands were recruited for mysterious new jobs in January, 1961, and left in February, telling their wives that their work was secret.

Mrs. Shamburger says her husband told her he was going to give instructions in the B-26 bomber. Mr. Gray told his wife he was going to Texas to work as a test pilot. Mr. Ray said he was going to a combined officers' training school.

Two months later they were reported dead—by accidental drowning.

At first the wives were told only that their husbands died on April 19, the date of the

invasion of the Bay of Pigs. Mr. Carlson arrived later from Miami Springs in behalf of an organization known as the Double Check Corp.

Mr. Carlson at this time told them their husbands might be alive and urged them to maintain secrecy. He and Mr. McDowell later informed them the men were dead and said the story was being released to newspapers.

Mr. Carlson told newsmen in May, 1961, the men went down in a C-46 cargo plane while on a flight to an unknown destination with an unknown cargo and that wreckage had been sighted.

He said Double Check had recruited the men, but said they were the only ones contacted. He described the organization as a kind of "broker." The organization Double Check represented had requested that its identity be kept secret, he said.

The first checks to the widows came from Double Check, a Florida corporation, but were changed to Bankers Trust in the summer of 1961.

The attorneys told the women they did not have to pay tax, and there have been no complaints from the Treasury Department.

Not Fortune Hunters

Prior to their deaths, the airmen drew salaries that were taxed. Mrs. Gray said her husband earned \$1,900 a month and an additional \$500 per flight. The other women declined to reveal their husbands' earnings.

All three insist their husbands did not hire out to anti-Castro forces for the invasion for their own enrichment.

Mrs. Ray said her husband "would talk to me about his fear that our two children would have to grow up under communism."

"Riley wasn't a soldier of fortune," said Mrs. Shamburger. "He didn't do this for the money."

"If they would tell the story then it would help things a lot," said Mrs. Gray.

The men had similar backgrounds. All had been associated with Hayes International Corp., a Birmingham company, in the Cuban invasion, she said.



Mrs. Wade C. Gray, widow of one of four Birmingham (Ala.) area men shot down during the Cuban invasion, displays a family album at her home.—AP Wirephoto.

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