

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



10/31/61

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Tom,

I guess this is dead for all practical purposes so am returning it herewith, together with copies of two notes to General Taylor.

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Attachments

(Thomas A. Parrott)

MS/CSG 2032

HS/CSG 2632

8/1/61

General Taylor,

Subject: The Invasion of Cuba, a Battle Report

I think this could be a very useful document. It is too detailed in some respects, notably in listings ^{and} materiel, and it is probably too long for magazine treatment - running as it does to about 10,000 words. In some respects it reads more like an after-action report than a popular article.

On the other hand, this is only a first shot at pulling together the whole story from what might be called "the beachhead point of view." The material is here and it would be no great trick for a trained magazine editor or writer to put it into shape.

Publication would seem to me to have two primary advantages:

First, as the paper itself says, the members of the Brigade are in a real sense the "forgotten" men of the entire operation, and "whoever's fault the failure was, it was not the fault of these men." An article based on this would go a long way toward setting the public record straight.

Second, since it is agreed in high places that steps should be taken to "restore public confidence in the CIA." Such an article could help here also. For example, such widely-credited misconceptions as poor training, faulty equipment, reliance on Batista^sianos, political orientations of either extreme right or left, lack of tactical surprise, etc., etc., are also rebutted throughout the story. This is done, however, without a baseball bat and, therefore, has the ring of truth.

With one possible exception, there is no political undertone to all this. The effects of the cancellation of the second Cuban air strike are dealt with at length in several parts of the manuscript. A beachhead view could obviously not be written without this.

On the other hand, there is no attempt to assess the reasons for the cancellation or to complain about them. The possible exception to this somewhat detached view of the policy decisions is at the top of page 29. Here, possibly a little too much is made of the reason why

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the frogmen were not as effective as they might have been. (Allegedly because of policy considerations following the decision to play down the invasion aspect of the operation.)

The Conclusions - which are quite short and which begin on page 50 - might be worth glancing at.

I would certainly recommend that authorization be given to go ahead and discuss this with Life. Perhaps this is ^athe proper subject to raise with the Special Group. I do not know whether the White House would feel that they ought to get into it to any further degree than through your Chairmanship of the Group or not.

TAP

I assume you have seen Hanson Baldwin's pieces in the Times of July 31 and August 1. Actually, these accomplish some of the points made above, but hardly to the audience that could be expected of a popular magazine. *Perhaps a more worthwhile audience!*

7/28/61

HS/CSG 2632

General Taylor,

Mr. Dulles asked that I show you this document. It is based on the stories by [redacted], with which I believe you are familiar.

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Mr. Dulles' idea is that it might be suitable for an article say in Life, later to be picked up by the Readers Digest. The point would be that it would put the image of the courageous Cuban^{force} in proper perspective. An effort has been made to make it completely objective and non-political.

He also notes that there is too much detail, particularly on materiel.

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THE INVASION OF CUBA: A BATTLE REPORT

The four small blacked-out transports of the invasion force, with their landing craft, rendezvoused on schedule 5,000 yards off-shore. It was a few minutes after 2300 hours on D-Day Minus One, 16 April 1961. The sky was clear. There was no moon. The wind was calm and the sea smooth. Before dawn, if possible, the landing craft would put 1,400 men ashore in Cuba.

Warming up at bases 500 to 600 miles back were the force's aircraft: fifteen B-26 fighter-bombers, six C-54 transports and five C-46 transports. The bombers would try to knock out Castro's air force on the ground at the outset and thereafter would provide the invasion force with close support. The transports would drop airborne troops ahead of the amphibious elements to block the roads down which Castro would send his militia to try to repel the invaders. This mission accomplished, the transports

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would ferry troops and supplies in accordance with the tactical situation as it developed. After the first day or two, aircraft could use strips ashore that the invading forces would have captured, secured and stocked with the necessary supplies.

As the invaders expanded their beachhead and built up their strength and were obviously in Cuba to stay, and as they inflicted more and more damage on the government forces, anti-Castro Cubans would begin to join the invaders--who were provided with arms, ammunition and supplies for this contingency. Guerrillas would disrupt communications and attack scattered Castro forces in the interior.

When these processes had developed sufficiently, the Cuban government-in-exile would land in the area held by the invaders, would proclaim itself the lawful government of the country and would appeal for recognition and support. The United States and other well-disposed countries would recognize the new government--and could then intervene openly in its behalf.

The Forgotten Men

The failure of the Cuban invasion was to reverberate around the world. Castro would make a Roman holiday out of it--and offer to trade the prisoners he had taken for varying numbers of varying kinds

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of tractors. The failure of the invasion would evoke the raucous scorn of Communists everywhere and in the free world would cause much soul-searching and no little recrimination.

Should the United States have supported the invasion, as Washington tacitly admitted it had done? Should it ever support such operations? If it should do so, can it do so--for example, with the secrecy required? Why had the invasion failed? What had gone wrong?

So great would the clamor be, so intense and all-absorbing the soul-searching, so bitter the recriminations and so tight-lipped the official secrecy, that the world would hear--and still has heard--almost nothing of the skill and toughness and valor of the men who waded ashore and parachuted beyond the beaches and flew the aircraft from their distant bases and fought on, overwhelmingly outnumbered, until their ammunition was exhausted and their cause at least temporarily lost. In this sense, these men of the Cuban Brigade are forgotten men, and their feats of arms are forgotten feats.

This is the story of these men, and the story of how they fought and why and how they were defeated.

The Brigade

The Brigade was an elite force. These were men who not only hated Castro enough to have left Cuba because of him, but enough to fight their

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way back into Cuba to destroy him. They were, moreover, pre-eminently qualified by education, training and experience--as well as by morale and motivation--to destroy him. The Brigade Commander, the Deputy Commander and most of the other senior officers were graduates of the Cuban Military Academy and had been officers in the regular Cuban army. Several had studied at American universities, and some had attended U. S. Army schools--for example, the Infantry School at Fort Benning and the Engineers' School at Fort Belvoir. A not inconsiderable number had served in the guerrilla forces with which Castro had fought his way to power--only to become bitterly disillusioned when he later showed his hand as a Communist.

These men, furthermore, had been trained especially for the invasion, and their training had been extraordinarily tough and thorough, even by the standards of the extraordinarily tough and thorough men who had conducted it. The Brigade trained--and under exceptionally exacting and even primitive conditions--ten hours a day, six days a week, some of them for as long as eight months. This was all "cross-training" and it was all combat training. Each man was trained in the use of all the weapons in his company, and live ammunition was employed in problems. During his training, each man fired on the average more than the average U. S. Army soldier fires during

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three years of service. Every man in the Brigade's heavy gun crews qualified as Expert Gunner by U. S. Army standards, and the Brigade's airborne troops could mount their mortars as fast as the men of the U. S. 82d and 101st Airborne Divisions can.

Most of the men who had served in the Cuban army had done so--necessarily--during the Batista regime. This no more made these men "Batistianos" politically, though, than previous service under Castro had made men Communists--no more than Robert E. Lee's service in the U. S. Army had made him a Yankee.

With few exceptions, the political views of the officers and men of the Brigade were those of the middle bands of the spectrum between left and right. So far as the extreme left is concerned, Communists obviously had no interest in fighting Castro. So far as the extreme right is concerned, the Brigade made every effort to keep "Batistianos" and other ultra-reactionaries out, and they seem to have succeeded, on the whole.

Man for man, furthermore, the Brigade was one of the best-equipped, and one of the strongest in terms of fire power, that ever landed on a hostile shore.

Large items of equipment aboard the four transports at the rendezvous offshore the night of 16 April included: 108 Browning

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Automatic Rifles; 49 .30-caliber machine guns; 22 60mm. mortars; 20 81mm. mortars; seven 4.2-inch mortars; 18 57mm. recoilless rifles; four 75mm. recoilless rifles; 47 3.5-inch rocket launchers; nine flame throwers; five M-41 Walker Bulldog tanks; twelve $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ton trucks; one 3,000-gallon aviation gasoline tanker truck; one "cherry-picker" tractor crane; one dozer; two 400-gallon water trailers; eleven $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trucks; and nine $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trailers.

In addition, the equivalent of two basic loads of ammunition for all the assault troops was deck-loaded aboard the transports; seven $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ton trucks lifted in three LCU's were preloaded with ammunition of all types; arms, field equipment and limited ammunition for outfitting 4,000 guerrillas were stowed away in the transport Atlantico and the two LCI's, the Blagar and the Barbara J; and ten days' supply of ammunition, POL and food was loaded in the hold of the transport Rio Escondido.

Three more transports with additional supplies would follow the assault shipping. Still further supplies would be flown in by air. And, finally, arms, equipment and supplies for 15,000 men were available and could be drawn upon at bases far to the rear.

The Beachhead

The target area chosen for the assault lay in the center of the southern shore of the Zapata Peninsula, which spreads out into the

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Caribbean, in the shape of a wide-opened fan, off the southern coast of Cuba.

The troops would land on narrow sand and coral beaches along this stretch of shore. Inland from the beaches spread a belt of dry, scrub-covered land approximately 40 miles in length from east to west and from three to six miles in width. Beyond this, a vast swamp impassable to foot troops separated the belt of scrub and the beaches from the interior.

The only approaches to the beachhead from the interior consisted of three roads crossing the swamp from the north and a coastal road leading to the east flank of the beachhead from the town of Cienfuegos. In the swamp, movement was possible only on the three roads, and the coastal road from the east led through a narrow strip of land where the swamp came almost down to the shore.

The Scheme of Maneuver

The 2d and 5th Infantry Battalions, totalling approximately 400 men, would go ashore over the beach at the small seaside resort town of Playa Larga at the head of the Bay of Pigs. As soon as sufficient supplies were ashore and the beach and town were secured, the two

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battalions would move out northward along the road that ran from Playa Larga to the interior.

Meanwhile, it was assumed, Castro would have started forces down the road toward the beach and these forces would have been engaged and checked by airborne elements which would have parachuted on drop zones inland along the road at dawn.

The 2d and 5th Battalions would link up with the airborne troops and this combined force, supported by fighter and fighter-bomber aircraft, would, if possible, destroy the opposing militia.

The main body of the invasion force would go ashore over the beach at Playa Giron, 18 miles south of Playa Larga and east of the mouth of the bay. This force would consist of the 4th and 6th Infantry Battalions, a heavy weapons battalion, a tank company and the headquarters, services and shore party elements of the Brigade--a force totalling approximately 800 men. Reserve supplies for the entire Brigade would also be put ashore here.

Playa Giron is a seaside resort much like Playa Larga, although somewhat larger. The forces landing at Playa Giron would secure the beach and town, seize an airfield just outside the town and then move northward up the second of the three roads through the swamp from the interior.

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Castro would send troops down this road, too, and these, also--like those moving on Playa Larga at the head of the bay--would be checked by airborne elements dropped inland at dawn. The 4th and 6th Battalions would link up with the airborne elements, with the same mission as that of the troops north of the head of the bay--to hold the Castro forces and, with the support of fighter and fighter-bomber aircraft, destroy them.

Finally, the 3d Infantry Battalion of approximately 200 men would land at "Green Beach"--a deserted stretch of the shore 16 miles east of Playa Giron where the third of the three roads across the swamp from the interior met the coast road in an area where the swamp extended almost to the sea. This battalion would check any Castro forces that might try to move on Playa Giron along either of these two roads. If neither of these threats materialized, the battalion would join the forces at either Playa Larga or Playa Giron, leaving only a rear guard behind at the road juncture.

The Attacks on Castro's Airfields on 15 April

The invasion plan called for two air attacks by the Brigade's B-26's to knock out Castro's meager air force on the ground at the outset of the operation and thereby guarantee that the Brigade would control the air. The first of these air strikes was scheduled for D-2 and the

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second for the morning of D-Day itself.

The B-26's made the first of these strikes, as planned, at dawn of 15 April--and accomplished more than had been hoped for from it. Intelligence had ascertained that Castro had a total of only 35 tactical aircraft: eight T-33 jets, fourteen Sea Furies and thirteen B-26's. Of this total, only fifteen to eighteen planes were operable as of D-2.

All the Castro aircraft were based at three fields: San Antonio los Banos and Campo Libertad, near Havana, and a field at Santiago. Eight of the Brigade's B-26's bombed and strafed these fields and their aircraft. Three attacked San Antonio de los Banos, three Campo Libertad and two Santiago. Each B-26 carried ten 250-pound fragmentation bombs, eight 5-inch rockets and full ammunition for its eight .50-caliber machine guns. These attacks knocked out approximately half of Castro's planes: four of his eight operable T-33's, eight of his fourteen operable Sea Furies and six or seven of his operable B-26's.

Following these attacks, Castro concentrated all his still-operable aircraft at San Antonio de los Banos and Campo Libertad, thereby setting them up as ideal targets for the second Brigade air strikes scheduled for dawn on D-Day. He also concentrated considerable proportions of his tanks and artillery at these same two fields, where maximum damage could be done to them, too, by this same scheduled strike.

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The D-Day strike was, however, cancelled--and cancelled at the very last moment.

The order reached the Brigade's distant air base at 0130 D-Day, 17 April. The B-26's were forbidden to attack San Antonio de los Banos and Campo Libertad--or any other targets in the interior of Cuba. Instead, they were to provide close ground support for the Brigade.

The transport planes had just taken off from the base with the 1st Airborne Battalion for the drops inland from the beaches. The B-26's, which were due to take off at 0200, were warming up on the runways. The amphibious forces were going ashore at Playa Larga and Playa Giron. It was too late to stop the invasion even if the Cubans had wanted to stop.

Cancellation of the D-Day air attacks on Castro's air force on the ground meant that Castro would control the air over the landing beaches. The fifteen to eighteen planes he had at his disposal on D-Day hardly constituted a formidable force, but they were enough.

Even when fighting on equal terms, Castro's Sea Furies and T-33's would have been more than a match for the Brigade's B-26's, and the two air forces would not be fighting on anything like equal terms.

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For Castro's planes would be flying from airfields only a few minutes from the landing beaches--airfields which, moreover, would be immune from air attack. As a result of Castro's control of the air, furthermore, the Brigade's planes were never able to make effective use of the airfield at Playa Giron--or of any other in Cuba. The Brigade's B-26's had to fly four hours to reach the beaches and four hours to get back to their bases, and, in consequence, were obliged to carry so much fuel that their payloads--and their maneuverability--were limited, and so was the time they could remain over the beaches. On terms like these, even Castro's B-26's had an enormous advantage over the Brigade's B-26's.

The Action at Playa Larga

The Approach to the Beach

Meanwhile the amphibious forces, unaware of the cancellation of the second air strike, were proceeding according to plan. Shortly after 2300 on 16 April, the LCI Barbara J and the transport Huston left the other assault vessels at the rendezvous and slipped into the bay, headed for Playa Larga, and, when three miles off the beach, hove to and the Barbara J launched her two 20-foot boats. One of the boats

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stood by the Huston; the other made for the shore with an Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) of frogmen who would reconnoiter the beach and place lights to mark the landing areas. The Barbara J and the Huston followed slowly to within one mile of the beach and the troops began to transfer from the Huston into her small boats.

The Frogmen

The frogmen reached the shore in a small rubber boat, undetected, at 0130. The little resort town was brightly lighted; vacationers were strolling through the streets. The frogmen placed a white blinking marker light at the right end of the beach and--still without being detected--re-entered their boat and made for the left end of the beach to place the second light. As they approached the shore the second time, however, they saw that a group of militia men were standing near the point where the light was to be placed. They therefore informed the Huston by radio of the presence of the militia and said that, in order to gain every possible moment, they would not attempt to place the second light; instead, they requested the transport to tell them ten minutes before the first landing craft with troops were to start for the beach, and the frogmen would then move in as close to shore as possible and turn the light on in their boat to mark the left end of the landing area.

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The Huston signalled shortly that the first landing craft were about to be dispatched and the frogmen moved in and turned on their lights-- whereupon the militia saw the vessel and opened fire with small automatic weapons. The frogmen returned the fire with two BAR's and two submachine guns and silenced the militia, who fled, and the first troops came ashore. It was 0330 hours.

The First Landings

The first troops across the beach moved on in to Playa Larga--which was still brightly lighted--and soon rounded up 40 of the approximately 50 militia in the town. Intelligence had reported that only twelve militia were stationed in Playa Larga, as a guard for a radio transmitter. This intelligence was accurate, as was later ascertained. But approximately 40 additional militia had arrived at the resort the day before for a holiday.

Shortly after the Brigade troops had finished rounding up the militia, a column of seven militia trucks was seen approaching Playa Larga along the coast road from the west, and the Barbara J opened fire on them with all its weapons--eight .50-caliber machine guns, three .30-caliber machine guns, a 75mm. recoilless rifle, a 57mm. recoilless rifle and an assortment of hand-carried weapons. This formidable fire

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knocked out the first few trucks; the following vehicles stopped; and the militia aboard who had survived the attack fled, leaving their weapons behind and abandoning the bodies of several men who had been killed.

The Enemy Air Attacks

Thus everything had gone well up to now. With the coming of first light, however, Castro's planes took off from their unmolested airfields less than 100 miles away and attacked.

The first to appear, a B-26, came in low from out of the sun and made three passes, firing its machine guns, over the beach. On the first pass, it did no damage; on the second, it wounded a man in one of the landing boats; on the third pass, the plane was caught in the fire from the boats and the beach and began to smoke, went out of control and crashed inland. One parachute was seen to open.

A Sea Fury now appeared and strafed the Barbara J and the Huston and dropped two bombs--without, however, doing any damage--and two Brigade B-26's flew over at this juncture, escorting the transport planes with the airborne troops for the parachute drops along the road leading northward from the beach, and the Sea Fury fled.

But the enemy soon renewed his strikes against the Barbara J and

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the Huston. A Sea Fury attacked first and threatened the two vessels so gravely that they moved five miles down the bay from the beach to await better air cover by Brigade planes. No Brigade air support materialized, however, and an enemy T-33 now moved in, firing its machine guns and rockets. One of the rockets scored a near-miss on the Barbara J, opening a welded seam, and the LCI began to take water, and two other rockets hit the Huston near the stern, damaging her rudder so badly that the ship lost steerage.

The Huston was lying cross-wise in the bay, with her bows toward the western shore, and, on orders from the Barbara J, reversed her engines and backed away from the beach. She now started to sink rapidly by the stern, however, and, as she did so, an enemy Sea Fury attacked. Gasoline from the Huston's cargo was now rapidly spreading around both the Huston and the Barbara J, furthermore, and the Huston, accordingly, now ran herself full speed ahead and grounded herself 100 yards offshore and the crew and the troops aboard began jumping over the sides and swimming toward land. The Sea Fury continued making strafing runs, firing both on the Huston and the Barbara J and on the men in the water. At least six men were killed by these attacks and seven drowned trying to swim to shore.

Approximately 220 men were aboard the Huston when she beached herself --one squad of the 2d Infantry Battalion, most of the 5th Infantry

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Battalion and the ship's crew of twenty. When all the survivors were ashore, the commanding officer of the 5th Battalion took command, established a perimeter and sent men back to the Huston to salvage such arms and equipment as they could from the decks and water-filled holds. These efforts met with only limited success, however--and enemy planes continued to attack and finally, in the late afternoon, set the Huston on fire.

None of the men who had been aboard the Huston ever joined the forces fighting at Playa Larga--or those at Playa Giron. They tried that night and again the next day to make their way to Playa Larga, but were driven back into the swamp by enemy militia and by .50-caliber machine gun fire from a 35-foot enemy patrol boat. Some of the men from the Huston may have escaped inland and a few were picked up by friendly fishing boats and other small craft later. Most of them, however, were taken prisoner. Thus approximately half the total Brigade force that was to have landed at Playa Larga was lost. Virtually all the supplies aboard the Huston were also lost--3,660 "C" rations; 164,680 pounds (including 409 drums) of aviation, automobile and other fuel; equipment and supplies for a 50-bed hospital; and almost 200 tons of ammunition. These losses were crippling blows.

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The Airborne Operation

Meanwhile the airborne troops which had dropped behind Playa Larga were accomplishing their mission of buying time for the amphibious forces--and paying the price not uncommonly paid for such accomplishments.

The airborne elements were charged with seizing, and holding as long as possible, a four-mile long causeway which carried the road from the north through the swamp. Eighteen men of Company B of the 1st Battalion were to drop at the far end of this causeway, approximately eight miles from Playa Larga, and Company A of the 1st Battalion and elements of the battalion's heavy weapons company would drop at the near end of the causeway, approximately four miles from the town.

The drop zone at the far end of the causeway was fogged in when the C-46 and its two escorting B-26's arrived over it, and the entire airborne force therefore parachuted at the near end of the causeway--and just as they jumped, came under the fire of a battalion of militia moving toward the beach. At least ten men were killed before they reached the ground. More than twenty bullet wounds were found in each of several of their bodies.

The men who landed safely found themselves fighting against heavy and steadily mounting odds. For more and more powerful militia forces now came down from the north. The airborne troops blocked the road long

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enough to give the Brigade's amphibious forces time to secure their beachhead, receive reinforcements from Playa Giron 18 miles away and move out on the road toward the causeway. Despite the airborne elements' best efforts, however, the militia forced a way through them at approximately 1400 hours and proceeded toward the beach. The paratroopers fought on all that day, from such cover as they could find along the road, until their ammunition was exhausted; they were then overrun, taken prisoner and sent to the Sports Palace in Havana.

Among them was Pedro Vera, the Executive Officer of the 1st Battalion. Vera had been wounded, but he did not allow this to trouble him unduly. He persuaded a guard at the Sports Palace to give him a pair of militia uniform trousers and a T-shirt, walked out of the building using the name of another guard he had made sure was elsewhere at the time and walked and hitch-hiked the 500 miles to Guantanamo Bay, hoping to find asylum in the U. S. Navy Base there. He found he could not get through the Castro militia guarding access to the base, however-- whereupon he made his way the 500 miles back to Havana and found asylum in one of the Latin American embassies there.

The Withdrawal to Playa Giron

The paratroopers fighting at the causeway, shielded amphibious elements on the beach, until early afternoon, from the militia

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forces moving down from the north, as we have seen. But between 500 and 600 militia, accompanied by tanks, either had crossed the causeway before the airborne elements dropped or had previously been in position just outside the town, and this force attacked the beach at approximately 1000 hours.

Only approximately 225 men of the 2d Infantry Battalion had got ashore at Playa Larga, as noted above. But these men's fire power was fantastic in proportion to their numbers--fifteen 3.5-inch rocket launchers; three 81mm. mortars; three 60mm. mortars; a 75mm. recoilless rifle; three 57mm. recoilless rifles; a 50-caliber machine gun; three .30-caliber air-cooled machine guns; and a .30-caliber water-cooled machine gun in addition to the men's individual weapons--and they drove off the militia, inflicting heavy casualties. Successful though this engagement was, however, it gravely depleted the battalion's ammunition, and a call for help was sent to the forces at Playa Giron.

The 2d Battalion still hoped to be joined--and joined before it was too late--by the 5th Battalion, which, as we have seen, had been aboard the Huston when the transport beached herself five miles down the bay. The 2d Battalion alone could hardly hope to hold the Playa Larga beachhead, to say nothing of expanding it as provided for in the invasion

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plan. It would be suicidal, on the other hand, for the 225 men of the battalion to remain on the beach and await the heavy militia onslaughts which would surely come, and, unless checked, would come soon. The battalion, accordingly, moved out of Playa Larga and up the road toward the near end of the causeway.

It got within less than a mile of the paratroopers fighting there, but was unable to break through the militia and join them. It did, however, set up an ambush along the road between the causeway and the town--an ambush designed to trap the militia forces which--it must be assumed--would soon arrive.

In fact, shortly after 1400 hours a force of 1,500 militia, riding in open trucks and accompanied by tanks, fell into the trap which the 2d Battalion had set, and the Battalion opened up with its savage fire power--reinforced, just in time, by a tank and two 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ -ton trucks sent from Playa Giron. So complete was the surprise that many of the militia were killed before they could get out of their trucks. Those who survived took cover and dug in and heavy fighting developed which lasted until dark.

The 2d Battalion held its ground. Indeed, it put five enemy tanks out of action--three heavy Russian tanks with its 57mm. recoilless rifles

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and two Shermans with its 3.5-inch rocket launchers. The battalion's position was, however, precarious: It was outnumbered several times-- and there was still no sign of the 5th Battalion; its ammunition was again running low; and the beachhead in its rear was virtually defenseless. That night, accordingly, the battalion fell back to Playa Larga.

The badly mauled militia remained all night where they had been ambushed. Only after dawn the next day did they move on--cautiously-- toward the beach.

By now, the 2d Battalion's position was not only precarious: without reinforcements, without ammunition and supplies and without air cover, its position was hopeless so long as it remained where it was. There was only one thing to do, and the battalion did it--it retired in good order down the coast road to Playa Giron, taking its wounded with it. The militia followed at a prudent distance, and no wonder: They had lost half the force the 2d Battalion had ambushed. The battalion had lost 25 men killed in action.

The Action at Playa Giron

The Brigade forces at Playa Giron, too, had fought bravely and skillfully. But they, too, had been crippled despite this, and owing to the same single circumstance--Castro's control of the air. The actions

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at the two beaches were, indeed, strikingly similar up to the end.

The Approach to the Beach

As the LCI Barbara J and the transport Huston slipped into the mouth of the bay en route to Playa Larga at 2300 hours on D-Minus-One, the LCI Blagar headed for Playa Giron. The other craft of the invasion force followed slowly a few minutes later--the transports Rio Escondido, Atlantico and Caribe; four landing craft: vehicles/personnel (LCVP's); and three landing craft: utility (LCU).

The Blagar's mission was to launch an Underwater Demolition Team (UDT) of frogmen who would reconnoiter the beach, place landing lights and signal the landing force in--the 4th and 6th Infantry Battalions, totalling approximately 375 men, who were aboard the Caribe and the Rio Escondido, respectively; a tank company of 24 men with five M-41 tanks; a heavy gun battalion of 114 men with seven 4.2-inch mortars and four 75mm. recoilless rifles; an intelligence reconnaissance company of 68 men; and a headquarters and service company of 156 men. As soon as the 4th and 6th Battalions were ashore, the Blagar would take the 3d Infantry Battalion of 177 men, who were aboard the Atlantico, to the third beach 16 miles down the coast and land them there, employing one of the LCVP's and the Blagar's own two 20-foot boats.

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The Atlantico would remain at Playa Giron to land supplies for the operation there.

The Frogmen

The Blagar launched the frogmen in its catamaran, or "cat," at approximately 2345 hours from two miles offshore. The "cat" was a 20-foot, high-speed, fiber-glass boat powered by two 70-HP outboard motors. It mounted a .50-caliber machine gun forward and a .30-caliber machine gun between the two motors in the stern. Also aboard was a shoulder-fired 57mm. recoilless rifle. Lashed to the "cat" was a 12-foot rubber boat, powered by a 16-HP silent motor, for operating in very shallow waters close inshore.

The "cat" proceeded toward shore, leaving the Blagar behind, and half a mile offshore the frogmen transferred to the rubber boat for the final run in to the beach. It was now midnight, and the landing beach itself was deserted and dark. The town to the left of the beach, however, was still well lighted, and a cluster of bright lights also showed in one of a group of small, one-story buildings at the shore end of a jetty which marked the right end of the beach.

When the rubber boat got to within approximately 500 yards of the

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beach, the frogmen saw that five or six men were standing near the buildings at the shore end of the jetty, looking seaward. Then, after a moment or two, the men went into one of the buildings and all the lights in the building went out. Fearing that they--or the Blagar-- must have been seen, the frogmen stopped moving toward the beach. They found that they themselves could neither see nor hear the Blagar, however; there were no signs of life from the buildings at the jetty; and after a few moments the frogmen decided their fears might well be groundless, and they continued on to the shore. Approximately 100 yards from the beach, the boat ran on a submerged coral ledge, but the frogmen pushed it on over the ledge and went on in to place their marking lights.

But just as the men were getting out of the boat to place the first light, a jeep drove out of the town along the coast road toward the beach and, catching the men and their boat in its headlights, drove on to a point on the road just opposite them and turned toward the water, throwing its headlights full on them. The frogmen immediately opened fire with their two BAR's and four submachine guns, putting out its lights, shattering its whole front end and killing the driver.

They discovered that the jeep bore the markings of the INRA, Castro's land reform institute, and that the driver was clad in an

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institute uniform. Thus it seemed possible that the vehicle's arrival had been by sheer chance, rather than as a result of any alarm. Whatever the cause, however, the consequence was clear; whether or not surprise had been lost before, it was certainly lost now. The firing on the jeep had--inevitably--been heard in the town.

The frogmen acted accordingly. They radioed the Blagar what had happened; they asked her to move in as close to shore as possible to cover the beach; they requested that the assault troops come ashore immediately; and they placed the first blinking red marker light at the water's edge near the shattered jeep. They then moved 100 yards down the beach and placed the second light. As they were doing so, all the lights in Playa Giron went out simultaneously. The frogmen continued on to the jetty--there was still no sign of life from the small building where the group of men had been seen earlier--and placed a third bright, steady white light at the seaward end.

The Blagar now warned the frogmen by radio that two trucks were approaching the beach from Playa Giron, doubtless alerted by the firing on the jeep--and the frogmen took up positions waist-deep in water off the seaward end of the jetty from which they could cover the beach. In a few moments, the trucks appeared, driving without lights. They drove

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as far as the shattered jeep and stopped and 30 to 40 militia dismounted and, after examining the jeep, started to walk toward the red marker light the frogmen had placed nearby. Without the light, the landings would be jeopardized, and the frogmen therefore now opened fire. The militia took cover on the far side of the road and returned the fire.

A new danger now materialized: a third truck approached the beach down the road from the north and stopped near the land end of the jetty; militia dismounted and took cover among the small buildings there; the men who had entered one of the buildings earlier now emerged and joined the militia; and they all opened fire on the frogmen, who were thus now under fire from both ends of the beach.

Fortunately for the frogmen, the Blagar now arrived, hove to approximately 200 yards offshore and swept the whole beach with its eleven .50-caliber and five .30-caliber machine guns and its two 75mm. recoilless rifles, silencing both enemy groups and driving them out of the beach area. A .50-caliber machine gun fired three or four bursts on the Blagar from a position between the jeep and the town, wounding one man aboard the LCI. The Blagar could not return this fire without shooting into the town. It fired high overhead, however, and so unnerved the machine gunner that he fled. The Blagar raked the beach

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for a few more minutes. Then, in the absence of any further enemy fire, it backed off into deep water and the first assault troops came ashore. It was shortly after 0100 hours.

The frogmen might have placed their marker lights undetected if they had swum ashore under water, as they had been trained to do. High policy considerations had, however, necessitated the use of the rubber boat for the final run in to the beach. For the invasion was not supposed to look like an invasion at all. It was supposed to be taken for an internal uprising from within Cuba. Every effort, therefore, had to be made to conceal the landings. Among other things, they all had to be made under cover of darkness. This meant that the assault craft had to stay at least 25 miles out at sea until nightfall and that all the landings were supposed to be completed before dawn. The frogmen, accordingly, could not take the time required to swim ashore; they were obliged to use boats.

The First Landings

Elements of the 4th Infantry Battalion were the first ashore. They were followed a few minutes later by the Brigade Commander--with his staff--who took command of the beach.

By 0130 the beach was secured and a company of the 4th Battalion was starting in to Playa Giron. There they found the militia who had

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been driven off the beach by the Blagar, together with the equivalent of another platoon, a total of approximately 100 men. The militia put up only token resistance; 73 of them were taken prisoner--including a 12-year old boy--and the others fled, leaving their weapons behind. Approximately 30 of them drove eastward along the coast road to the town of Cienfuegos to get help, and a few others headed, in a second truck, for Playa Larga at the head of the bay, to send an alert by radio from there to Havana. (There were no telephone communications between Playa Larga and Playa Giron; thus neither town knew the other had been attacked.) This second group, however, was stopped by a road block set up by the 2d Battalion, which, as we have seen, had landed at Playa Larga.

Meanwhile the landings continued. The 4th Battalion went on unloading from the Caribe and the heavy weapons battalion began to come ashore from the Atlantico and the 6th Infantry Battalion from the Rio Escondido.

Operations thus were proceeding according to plan--until, at 0420 hours, the Blagar received a radio message revealing the cancellation of the air strike on Castro's air fields which had been scheduled for

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dawn, and the diversion of the Brigade's air force to close ground support. The message added that the ships should unload as quickly as possible and then put out 50 miles to sea and not return to the beach until the next night.

Cancellation of the air strikes on Castro's air fields meant that the Brigade's ships and the forces ashore would be subject to air attacks, beginning at dawn, from which they had expected to be immune and for which they were ill prepared. It meant, more particularly, that the plan to send the Blagar to put the 3d Infantry Battalion ashore at the landing place down the coast must be abandoned. For to attempt the third landing would, on the one hand, deprive the forces at Playa Giron of the Blagar's fire power, which would now be desperately needed. And it would mean, on the other hand, that the Blagar, its decks crowded with the 3d Battalion, would be exposed to enemy air attacks throughout the two-hour trip to the third landing place, and the Blagar might well be lost with all aboard.

The commander of the Blagar therefore recommended that the 3d Battalion be put ashore at Playa Giron and be sent to the third landing place by truck along the coast road, and the Brigade Commander agreed to this. The battalion, accordingly, now began to go ashore from the Atlantico.

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Meanwhile, two of the LCVP's had been damaged on the coral reef offshore--one of them had had to beach itself and the other had sunk-- while the frogmen searched vainly for a way for the larger landing craft to get safely through. It was only toward dawn that a local fisherman was found who showed them a passage that could be used at high tide, and the first LCU's, accordingly, got through at 0630.

Shortly thereafter, with the beach and the town secured, elements of the 4th Battalion moving inland and boats with the last troops to be landed approaching the beach, enemy air attacks began.

The Enemy Air Attacks

The first enemy aircraft--a B-26-- came in out of the sun and made a firing pass with its machine guns at the landing craft. It inflicted no casualties, but damaged an LCVP offshore so badly that it had to be beached and could no longer be used. Thus three of the four LCVP's were now out of action. The troops on the beach and the vessels offshore brought all their fire to bear on the B-26 and drove it off toward Playa Larga.

A second enemy plane attacked at 0800--a Sea Fury, which dove on one of the Brigade's C-46's returning from the air drop inland. The Sea Fury made a firing pass with its 20mm. cannon on the transport and pulled up to

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1,000 feet and rolled over in preparation for a second pass, but was caught in the fire of the approximately 40 .50-caliber machine guns on the beach and the vessels offshore, started to smoke, went out of control and crashed, exploded and sank in the bay. The C-46, unscathed, continued on its way and returned safely to its distant base.

By 0930, elements of the 4th Battalion had captured the airstrip outside Playa Giron and reported it ready for use. This was to be of little avail, however, for thanks to the enemy's control of the air, only one Brigade plane was ever able to land on the strip.

Indeed, the first pilot who tried to do so was shot down in the attempt. Just after the taking of the strip, a Brigade B-26 chased an enemy B-26 over the beach toward the west and shot it down a few miles beyond in the direction of Playa Larga, but an enemy T-33 now attacked the Brigade B-26, the B-26 was hit and headed for the airstrip, but while it was coming in for a landing the T-33 attacked again and shot it down.

Enemy planes now attacked in an ineluctable crescendo. At about 1000 hours a Sea Fury flew in through all the fire put up from the beach and the ships and with one of its rockets hit drums of aviation gasoline on the deck of the Rio Escondido. The gasoline exploded, the deck was

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swiftly enveloped in flames and it was soon obvious that the fire was completely out of control--and the Rio Escondido's tanks were loaded with gasoline and she carried almost 400 tons of bombs, rockets and other ammunition as well. The order therefore was given to abandon ship and the crew began to jump over the sides and swim toward shore.

Despite the virtual certainty that the ship would blow up from one moment to the next, all the small boats headed for the men in the water, picked them up and started to take them to other vessels.

By now, a huge column of flame and smoke was rising from the burning ship and--when some of the small boats were still less than 1,000 yards from her--she was racked by a series of explosions, threw up a final, billowing, spreading mushroom-shaped cloud of flame, smoke and debris, turned over and sank in 600 fathoms of water.

All the men who had been aboard her were saved. The crew were put aboard the Blagar and the troops were sent to the beach. Virtually the entire cargo was, however, lost: 15,000 rations; 170 tons of gasoline; 380 tons of ammunition; six tons of communications, medical and other equipment; five $2\frac{1}{2}$ -ton, 6 x 6 trucks; one $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton truck; three $\frac{1}{4}$ -ton trailers; a 400-gallon water trailer; a fork lift with a 3-ton capacity; and a communications trailer. These losses were grave enough

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in themselves. Taken together with the losses which the beaching of the Huston had inflicted, they were to paralyze the Brigade.

The surviving ships now put to sea, hoping for air support and planning to return to the beach and unload under cover of darkness that night. The LCI Barbara J, which had arrived from Playa Larga, and the transports Caribe and Atlantico, all of which could do 12 knots, went ahead, and the Blagar followed, escorting the three slow LCU's. The plan was to rendezvous fifteen miles out at sea.

Three friendly B-26's flew cover for the Blagar and the three LCU's as long as they could, but this was only for 45 minutes. The planes' fuel reserves gave out then, and they had to return to their base. From that time on until dark, the landing craft were under constant air attack.

When the vessels reached the rendezvous point fifteen miles at sea, the Blagar called the Barbara J and the two transports and told them to assemble on her. The Barbara J soon appeared, but the Caribe and the Atlantico did not, nor did they answer the Blagar's calls. Both the transports' radios had been knocked out in attacks by an enemy B-26, it was later learned.

The landing craft continued on out to sea in search of the transports

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--and to escape the enemy air attacks, but these now became even more savage than before.

Soon after the Barbara J joined the Blagar and the LCU's, two enemy planes struck, a Sea Fury and a B-26. The Sea Fury circled over the landing craft at approximately 5,000 feet and the B-26 attacked first. The pilot came down in a long, low approach on the Blagar, flying no more than 30 feet above the water to make his first pass--but he waited too long to open fire, was hit by fire from the Blagar at a range of 500 yards and began to smoke, wobble and lose altitude. He began to fire his eight .50-caliber machine guns, but his aim was spoiled by the plane's erratic course and the fire did little damage. At 200 yards, he fired his rockets, but the plane was now wobbling crazily and was only a few feet above the water, and the rockets hit the water 50 yards short of the Blagar and exploded and the plane burst into flame at the same moment and struck the water at the same spot where the rockets had exploded--and ricocheted over the Blagar, strewing her decks with burning wreckage, and went into the water beyond, exploded and sank.

The Sea Fury now peeled off and came down in a strafing run on the Barbara J, scoring a few hits with its 20mm. cannon. It then pulled up and dove again and fired its four rockets at the LCU's, but all the

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rockets missed and the Sea Fury departed.

Lone enemy B-26's attacked the vessels twice later in the day. Neither pressed the attack, however. The fire from the landing craft held them both off, and they fired their rockets from safe distances and wide of the targets. The attacks broke off only with the coming of darkness.

The Attempts to Land Supplies

The landing craft proceeded southward, searching for the transports. During the night, orders were received to transfer arms and equipment for 500 men from the Barbara J, and all the Barbara J's own ammunition, to one of the LCU's and take the LCU in to the beach that night. When the course was charted, however, it was found that the slow LCU could not reach the shore before daylight, and the orders were countermanded.

Next day, 13 April, the landing craft continued their search for the transports and finally found them, 50 miles offshore. Orders now were received to transfer the transports' cargoes, plus the ammunition from both the LCI's, into the LCU's and escort them in to the beach before dawn the next day. The cargoes were duly transferred, and all the landing craft headed for the beach. While they were still 25 miles out, however, it was found once again that the landing craft could not arrive before first light, and they were therefore ordered to remain where they

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were until dark the next night and then make their run to the beach. For enemy planes were over the beach almost continuously during daylight, and it was considered a certainty that the craft would all be sunk before they could reach the beach and unload.

Meanwhile, orders were sent to the Brigade's air base to drop supplies to the forces at Playa Giron, and three drops were made that night and three the following night. But the help these supplies provided was only a small fraction of what the forces fighting ashore had to have if they were to survive--and the supplies in the ships were never landed.

The landing craft made one final attempt: in defiance of orders, they headed for the beach at about noon on 19 April, hoping to land at about 1800 hours. But it was too late. Organized resistance at Playa Giron ceased while the vessels were still more than 20 miles at sea.

The Airborne Operation

The plan for the airborne operation at Playa Giron was essentially the same as that for the drops at Playa Larga.

Inland from Playa Giron, too, a road ran northward and, beginning approximately nine miles from the beach, this road, too, was carried by a causeway for approximately four miles through the swamp. Elements of the

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1st Airborne Battalion would parachute at both ends of this causeway and hold it as long as possible against the enemy forces that would come down the road to attack the amphibious forces on the beach. The amphibious forces, for their part, would move up the road from the beach and join with the airborne elements as soon as possible. These combined forces would pin down the oncoming militia and, with the support of the Brigade's air power, would decimate the militia.

Finally, an outpost of the 1st Airborne Battalion would parachute across the third road from the interior--the road that reached the coast at "Green Beach" 16 miles south of Playa Giron. This drop zone lay inland from a point where a secondary lateral road branched off toward the west and, at San Blas at the near end of the causeway, joined the highway to Playa Giron.

The mission of the troops who dropped here was to prevent enemy forces from making either or both of two moves they might undertake from this point--an attack southward straight down the road to the coast and thence westward to Playa Giron; and/or an attack westward along the lateral road which would hit the flank of the forces at San Blas.

It was believed the enemy would send only relatively weak forces down this third road from the interior, and the airborne plan therefore provided for dropping only 18 men here. These men obviously would be

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speedily overrun if attacked by powerful militia forces. Even in this event, however, they would at least be able to warn the Brigade troops on the shore and at San Blas of the enemy's approach, and thus prevent their being taken by surprise.

All these drops were made on schedule, beginning at approximately 0700 hours on D-Day. Company C of the 1st Battalion, with part of the battalion's heavy weapons company plus battalion headquarters--a total of 50 to 60 men--parachuted on the drop zone near San Blas at the near end of the causeway on the road leading to Playa Giron. Eighteen men of Company B parachuted on the zone near Jocuma at the far end of the causeway and eighteen near San Miguel on the road leading to the coast at "Green Beach."

All three jumps were made without incident. The men came under no fire during their drops, and all landed safely. A single enemy militiaman fired on Company C shortly after it landed near San Blas. He then fled, however, and, when he failed to heed orders to halt, was shot and killed. This was the only initial enemy "resistance" that the airborne troops encountered.

The elements at the near end of the causeway speedily organized a defensive perimeter and set up battalion headquarters. They were joined

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during the course of the morning by the 4th Infantry Battalion moving up from Playa Giron with two tanks and two armored trucks.

The Action on D-Day

The enemy attacked down both the roads from the interior at noon, and 1st Airborne Battalion headquarters sent reinforcements to the two outposts--two companies of the 4th Infantry Battalion, with two tanks, to Jocuma, beyond the far end of the causeway, and a tank and seventeen men to San Miguel.

Heavy militia reinforcements now came down both roads, however, and both outposts had to be withdrawn later to the main position at San Blas at the near end of the causeway. The withdrawal of the forces from San Miguel left both the road to "Green Beach" and the lateral road to San Blas open, and militia began moving along them both.

In the same way, the withdrawal of the outpost at Jocuma left the length of the causeway open, and at 1700 hours strong militia forces attacked San Blas at the near end. The militia had neither tanks nor artillery, however, and the Brigade forces repelled the attack, inflicting heavy casualties.

That night, the enemy brought up both armor and artillery--heavy Russian JS-3 and JS-4 tanks, mounting 122mm. cannon, and Shermans; and

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120mm. mortars and 105mm. howitzers--and laid down a heavy fire on the Brigade forces, whose 3.5-inch rocket launchers, 4.2-inch mortars and 75mm. recoilless rifles were outranged. The opposing forces remained at San Blas, fighting all night.

The Action on D-Plus-One

By the morning of D-Day-Plus-One, the beachhead at Playa Giron was threatened from the North, West, and East. Not only was the enemy battering more and more heavily at San Blas in the North. In the West, the 2d Battalion was withdrawing from Playa Larga and falling back on Playa Giron, followed by militia. And additional enemy forces were moving through San Miguel to "Green Beach" and would soon be able to attack along the coast road from the East.

The Brigade was also under heavy air attack. Five of its B-26's flew close support missions over the beachhead that morning, bombing and strafing the militia. They were no match for the enemy's planes, however, and three of the five were shot down. The Brigade's pilots continued to fly gallant and even suicidal sorties, and inflicted savage punishment on the militia. The odds against them were, however, hopeless, and continued to mount until the end.

When the 2d Battalion arrived from Playa Larga, the men were fed and the battalion was put in reserve position in Playa Giron. At 1400 hours,

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however, elements of the 4th and 6th Battalions, which were holding the coast road approximately two miles east of the town, reported they were under attack and requested help, and the 2d Battalion was sent to reinforce them. The enemy attack was repulsed, and the 2d Battalion returned to Playa Giron. The militia made further attempts to advance from the east but did not break through until 1600 hours the next afternoon.

Meanwhile other elements of the 6th Battalion had been sent out westward along the road to Playa Larga to oppose the militia advancing in a long column from that direction in cautious pursuit of the 2d Battalion. At 1800 hours, when the head of the militia column was within a few miles of Playa Giron, the 6th Battalion troops attacked and six of the Brigade's B-26's simultaneously struck from the air, raking the column with their .50-caliber machine guns and rockets and dropping high explosive and napalm bombs. These attacks inflicted heavy casualties, damaged several tanks and trucks and drove the militia back. Six more B-26's attacked the militia during the night, moreover, causing still further damage. But the column, while badly hurt, was by no means destroyed. It attacked that night and drove the Brigade forces back to within two miles of the beach.

As of the morning of D-Day-Plus-One, the Brigade troops at San Blas

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consisted of elements of the 1st, 3d and 4th Battalions, totalling 200 men. An estimated 2,000 militia fell upon this force between 1400 and 1500 hours and, in the course of heavy fighting the rest of the day, forced them approximately $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles down the road toward the beach. The Brigade troops dug in there, however, and held this position through the night.

Thus at the end of the day, the Brigade troops were still holding off the militia assaults in all three sectors. The Brigade's ammunition was now dangerously low, however, and so was its food. Time was plainly running out.

The Brigade Commander was asked at 0500 hours if he wished to be evacuated. "I will never be evacuated," he replied. "We will fight to the end here if we have to."

The Action on D-Plus-Two

At first light the next day, a single C-46 transport plane landed on the airstrip outside Playa Giron with a load of rocket-launchers and ammunition. Brigade Headquarters had been requested to move the wounded to the air strip to be flown out by the C-46 and had agreed it would do so. The Brigade Surgeon refused, however, fearing enemy air attacks on the strip, and the plane departed with only one man from the beachhead,

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a courier sent out by the Brigade Commander with a report on the now desperate situation. This was the only occasion on which Brigade aircraft used the strip.

Five Brigade B-26's flew close support missions over the beachhead that morning; three of them were destroyed by enemy T-33's. Additional sorties were flown later in the morning as aircraft could be readied. A B-26 strafed enemy artillery positions at San Blas and bombed them with napalm, silencing the guns. The Brigade even mounted two ground attacks: The 1st and 3d Battalions, with three tanks, drove back the militia at San Blas more than two miles at dawn; and at 1100 hours the 2d Battalion--90 men with three tanks--attacked and drove back for three miles the advance elements of the militia approaching Playa Giron from the west.

But these were Pyrrhic victories--and the last the Brigade was to win. For these "victories" all but exhausted the Brigade's ammunition; the men had almost no food; except for rare, brief sorties by friendly planes, the enemy controlled the air; heavy enemy artillery fire was falling all over the beachhead area; and the men in the beachhead were now even fired upon by two enemy frigates that moved close inshore.

The enemy resumed the offensive at San Blas at 0900 and

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drove the 1st and 3d Battalions back to the positions they had moved forward from at dawn; attacked again at 1030 and drove the 1st and 3d still farther back down the road; and at 1400 hours broke through, shattering the Brigade forces and, with a large number of tanks, moved on Playa Giron.

At 1300 hours a column of enemy tanks hit the 2d Battalion on the road leading westward from the town; at 1430 the Battalion began to fall back toward the beach; and by 1700 hours the battalion's ammunition was exhausted and the enemy broke through in this sector too.

At 1600 hours, the three companies of the 4th Battalion blocking the road into Playa Giron from the east also ran out of ammunition and the enemy moved on the beach from this direction as well.

It was all over.

Foreseeing the end, the Brigade Commander had sent his last message shortly before:

Am destroying all communications and equipment.

Tanks are in sight. I have nothing left to fight

with. Am taking to woods. I cannot wait.

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Escapes

The enemy took only approximately 350 prisoners in the beachhead area. Except for these--and the astonishingly small number of men killed and incapacitated--the Brigade forces broke up into small groups and tried to escape.

The Commander of the 1st Airborne Battalion--Alejandro del Valle y Marti--and approximately 30 of his men made their way through the swamp from San Blas to the shore; sighted a local fisherman's small sailboat anchored in the bay; and tried to swim out to it. The enemy was now heavily shelling the beach; a Sea Fury machine-gunned the men in the water; and eight or ten of them were either killed by the enemy artillery or the Sea Fury or drowned.

Del Valle and 21 of the men reached the boat, however, upped anchor, hoisted sail and set off on a course they hoped would take them to Yucatan. But their reckoning was false; they had brought neither food nor fresh water with them; they found only approximately three gallons of water, a few raw potatoes and a little dry rice in the boat; and when they were picked up fourteen days later by the merchant vessel Atlantic Sea, only twelve of the men were still alive. Del Valle and nine others had died. Seven had been buried at sea; the bodies of the other three were still in the boat.

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Five men of the 2d Battalion found another small fishing boat-- which, however, had neither sail, engine, paddles nor oars, and which had a bullet hole in the bottom. The men plugged the hole with pieces of cloth they tore from their clothing and, using pieces of driftwood as paddles, set off in search of asylum. Approximately ten minutes after leaving the shore, they were machine-gunned by an enemy T-33 but none of the men was hit, nor was the boat. The jet then attacked another small boat with Brigade survivors approximately half a mile away and apparently killed all aboard.

The five survivors from the 2d Battalion drifted and "paddled" all that afternoon and night. At dawn they discovered they were near a small island and, making new "paddles" by tying pairs of the boat's floor boards together with their leather boot laces, they managed to get to the shore. The island was not inhabited and had no fresh water supply, but the men found three coconuts, broke them open and drank the milk and ate the meat and thereby survived until they were rescued four days later.

Four members of the crew of the Huston walked south along the western shore of the bay from where the transport had been beached and, swimming from one small offshore island to another and without food and with only swamp water to drink, made their way after six days to safety at Cayo del Sur.

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By all odds most of the men were, however, captured during the several days following the collapse of organized resistance. Hugo Sueiros Rios, the commanding officer of the 2d Battalion, was taken prisoner on D-Plus-Seven, for example. He had subsisted for five days on crabs he had caught, and by licking the leaves of vegetation in the early mornings when they were still covered with dew. Considerable numbers of men from the 6th Battalion headed in small groups for the Escambray Mountains, hoping to join forces with anti-Castro guerrillas operating there. Government forces, however, tightly encircled the area where they knew the men must be, set fire to the scrub and thus drove the men out and took them prisoner.

Conclusions

The Brigade was winning until its ammunition gave out. Its recruiting and training policies and programs proved sound in the test of battle. The men's morale was high, and they fought toughly and skillfully as well as courageously. As long as they had the wherewithal to fight with, they achieved their objectives on schedule; after the first few hours they were fighting most of the time against enemy forces which overwhelmingly outnumbered them--and they repeatedly defeated those forces; and they inflicted much worse punishment on the enemy than the enemy inflicted on them.

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An enemy message intercepted on D-Plus-One indicated that the militia had already suffered 1,800 casualties. Castro could not have gone on much longer taking punishment like this--plus the damage being done to his armor and artillery. The Brigade's casualty figures can only be approximated, but fewer than 150 men apparently were killed in action.

The Brigade's equipment proved itself in battle too. The enemy excelled in three respects--artillery, armor and air power. The Brigade's biggest weapon, the 4.2-inch mortar, had a range of only 6,000 yards, whereas the militia had 105mm. howitzers with a range of 12,000 yards and heavy Russian artillery which could shoot even farther. The enemy, moreover, had a far larger number of tanks, and tanks with greater fire power. The Brigade had only five light M-41 Walker Bulldogs, which mount 76mm. cannon. The militia had several times this many tanks--not only American Shermans but also Russian T-34's mounting 85mm. cannon and JS-3's and JS-4's mounting 122mm. guns.

Despite this, however, the Brigade did much worse damage to the enemy armor than the enemy did to the Brigade's. The Brigade put at least 20 militia tanks out of action. The guns of two of the Brigade's M-41's could no longer be fired when the fighting ended, but the other three tanks functioned with full effectiveness until they ran out of

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ammunition. The Brigade did much of this damage, moreover--perhaps most of it--with its 3.5-inch rocket launchers and 57mm. recoilless rifles. With the control of the air on which the invasion plan had been based, the Brigade could have done vastly more damage--not only to the enemy armor but also to his artillery, his transport and his troops.

The Brigade's failure to win control of the air doomed the invasion from the start. It was enemy air action that robbed the Brigade of the overwhelming proportion of its supplies by sinking the Rio Escondido, forcing the Huston to beach herself and driving the Caribe and the Atlantico out to sea. This, in turn, had the consequence, among others, that the Brigade was never able to make effective use of the airstrip at Playa Giron. Only three enemy T-33's and two Sea Furies apparently were still in action after D-Day. Thanks to their ability to use airfields nearby, however, these aircraft were able to fly almost continuous cover over the beachhead. The Brigade's B-26's were almost helpless against these fighters. Castro's victory on 19 April was par excellence a victory through air power--the power of five small planes.

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