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How CIA Poisoned Cuban Livestock

Two years after Richard Nixon announced amid great publicity that Washington was renouncing the use of biological and chemical warfare, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) provided anti-Castro terrorists with a swine fever virus that forced the killing of 500,000 Cuban pigs.

The latest account of the CIA's criminal activity was revealed in part by a counter-revolutionary Cuban exile disgruntled by the government's investigation of terrorist activities carried out by his group in Florida.

Reporters Drew Fetherston and John Cummings, who broke the story in *Newsday*, a Long Island, New York, newspaper, also cited testimony by the American intelligence agent who gave the virus to the Cuban exiles.

According to this agent, the operation began early in 1971 at Fort Gulick, an army base in the Panama Canal Zone where the CIA operates a paramilitary training center for career personnel and mercenaries. The unnamed agent was given a sealed container filled with African swine fever virus—a highly contagious organism that infects only pigs.

The container was eventually transferred to Cuban territory near the U.S. Navy Base at Guantanamo Bay near the end of March 1971. Six weeks later, the Western Hemisphere had the first outbreak of African swine fever in its history.

The virus, which can be transmitted rapidly through the water or food supply, could have easily gone undetected for months. As it was, 500,000 pigs had to be slaughtered to prevent the spread of the epidemic. The outbreak was labeled the "most alarming event" of 1971 by the UN Food and Agricultural Organization.

Until the article by Fetherston and Cummings appeared, the mystery of how the disease had come to Cuba remained unsolved. Had the Cubans thought of blaming the CIA, they surely would have been accused of paranoia.

An investigation into the incident is being carried out by the Senate Intelligence Committee. "In a case like this, though," an "intelligence source" in Miami explained to Fetherston and Cummings, "they would always give them (CIA officials in Washington) plausible deniability." □