

## 60TH ANNIVERSARY



# BAY OF PIGS INVASION

In April 1961, more than 1,000 Cuban exiles stormed ashore at the Bay of Pigs, Cuba, hoping to ignite a revolution among the people to overthrow Cuban leader Fidel Castro. But a series of tactical mistakes, ill-timed decisions and miscalculations resulted in one of the biggest operational failures in U.S. history.

### ▶ KEY PLAYERS



**Dwight D. Eisenhower**  
U.S. President



**John F. Kennedy**  
U.S. President



**Fidel Castro**  
Cuban Prime Minister



**Nikita Khrushchev**  
Soviet Premier

### ▶ PRELUDE

After three years of warfare, **FIDEL CASTRO** and his guerrilla army entered Havana on Jan. 1, 1959, forcing **GENERAL FULGENCIO BATISTA** to flee the country. Castro installed himself as prime minister.

In February 1960, Castro signed a pact with Soviet Premier **NIKITA KHRUSHCHEV** to buy oil. U.S.-owned firms in Cuba refused to process the oil. Castro seized the firms, and the U.S. broke off relations. The relationship further deteriorated when Castro set up diplomatic ties with the Soviets, signing a pact for economic and military aid. Within a year, Castro declared himself a communist.

**U.S. PRESIDENT DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER** approved a CIA-led operation to remove Castro, using Cuban exiles to start a revolution.

### ▶ THE EXILES



The CIA sought out members of the **FRENTE REVOLUCIONARIO DEMOCRATICO**, a group of exiles in Miami, Florida, who fled Cuba when Castro came to power.

Operating with a \$13 million budget, the CIA recruited 1,400 exiles to their cause.

The exiles were taken to **USEPPA ISLAND** and trained in weapons, infantry tactics, land navigation, amphibious assault tactics, team guerrilla operations and paratrooping. Thirty-nine pilots were trained at an air base in **GUATEMALA** and were later joined by the rest of the brigade.

#### BRIGADE'S NAME

In September, brigade member **CARLOS RODRIGUEZ SANTANA** was killed in a training accident. His comrades chose to name the brigade after his serial number: 2506.

#### DOUBLE AGENTS

Among the Cuban exiles the CIA recruited were double agents who gave Castro information on the upcoming invasion.



Brigade 2506 makes its way inland.

### ▶ THE PLAN

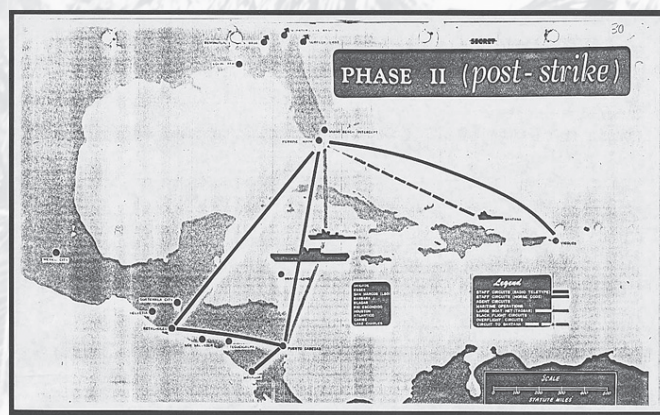
Shortly after his inauguration, President John F. Kennedy authorized the invasion. The plan to overthrow Fidel Castro was broken down into three phases.

#### PHASE ONE

Pilots of Brigade 2506 would bomb three of Castro's air force bases, **DESTROYING AS MANY AIRCRAFT AS POSSIBLE** so Castro could not retaliate against the invasion. The pilots were to pose as disgruntled members of the **FUERZA AEREA REVOLUCIONARIA (FAR)** who shot up their own air bases, then defected to the U.S. This strike was planned for two days before the invasion.



A B-26 practices low level attacks in Guatemala.



#### PHASE TWO

Brigade 2506 pilots would drop bombs on air bases to **DESTROY ANY REMAINING PLANES** in the hours before the invasion. This would ensure the invaders wouldn't be bombed from above.

#### PHASE THREE

The **1,400-MEMBER BRIGADE** would invade Cuba by sea and air. Some would storm the beach at **TRINIDAD**, an anti-Castro town with a good port, defensible beachhead, counter-revolutionary forces and easy access to the Escambray Mountains should they need to escape. Others would parachute farther inland. After setting up a defensive position, the United Revolutionary Front would send leaders to Florida and establish a provisional government. The success of the plan depended on the ability to **RECRUIT CUBANS TO JOIN THE INVADERS**.

### ▶ WHAT WENT WRONG

#### CHANGE IN PLANS

Kennedy was increasingly concerned about **DISGUIISING THE GOVERNMENT'S INVOLVEMENT**. He wanted to change the invasion site from Trinidad and gave the CIA four days to find a new place to land. A month before launch, the invasion site was changed to the **BAY OF PIGS**, surrounded by the largest swamp in Cuba and 50 miles away from the designated escape site in the mountains. It was a heavily pro-Castro area as he regularly vacationed there.

#### OUTNUMBERED, OUTGUNNED, OUTPLANNED

**APRIL 15, 1961:** Six B-26 bombers strike two airfields, three bases and Antonio Marceo Airport. The planes are disguised as Cuban aircraft. A "defecting" pilot takes off in a disguised American-made plane and lands in Miami. The U.S. **RUSE IS EXPOSED** when photos reveal the attacking aircraft noses are metal while Cuban aircraft use plastic noses.

**APRIL 16, 1961:** With the U.S. government exposed, Kennedy decides to **CANCEL THE AIRSTRIKES** to destroy the remaining bombers. Brigade pilots are about to take off when the decision is made.

**APRIL 17, 1961:** The invasion begins as eight pairs of aircraft fly over the Bay of Pigs. This scaled-back force leaves large periods of time when the invasion didn't have air support. When the Brigade reaches shore after encountering strong tides and unseen coral reefs, the Cuban forces, numbering **ROUGHLY 20,000**, are waiting.

**APRIL 19, 1961:** As the operation deteriorates, Kennedy authorizes six unmarked fighter jets to provide combat air patrol for one hour. Due to a miscommunication, the jets do not reach the invasion area in time to protect the Brigade's aircraft. Without air support, members of the Brigade either **SURRENDER** or try to escape by sea. More than **75%** end up in Cuban prisons. **MORE THAN 100** are killed.

### ▶ THE AFTERMATH

Attorney **JAMES DONOVAN** (below) conducted one-on-one negotiations with Castro for the release of the 1,113 Brigade members.

Attorney General **ROBERT F. KENNEDY** made personal pleas to pharmaceutical and baby food companies for contributions to sweeten the deal. Castro eventually agreed to release the prisoners, after 20 months, in exchange for \$53 million in baby food and medicine.



President John F. Kennedy and his wife, Jackie, greet members of the 2506 Cuban Invasion Brigade at Orange Bowl Stadium.

On **DEC. 23, 1962**, the first group of freed prisoners arrived in the United States. On Dec. 29, the surviving members met with President Kennedy at the Orange Bowl and presented him with the Brigade's flag.

*"I can assure you that this flag will be returned to this brigade in a free Havana."*  
President John F. Kennedy

Deeply affected by the failed operation, the Kennedy administration later would initiate **OPERATION MONGOOSE**, another plan to destabilize the Cuban government and possibly assassinate Castro.