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Transcript of Oral Interview

of Mr. Richard M. Bissell, Jr.

by Jack B. Pfeiffer

Farmington, Connecticut

17 October 1975

on the Bay of Pigs Operation

Tape No. 1 of 4

JBP I will start asking and we will see where we go from there.

RB All right, I think that is probably the best thing to do, at least until you get to that one area of changing concepts.

JBP The first question that I would like to ask is when in terms of your recollection did you become involved in the Bay of Pigs? Was it before the Eisenhower decision in March of 1960 that there should be an anti-Castro program with the United States Government or was it after that time or approximately when?

RB My guess is, Jack, that it was about that time. I don't have a clear recollection of when I first became aware of a presidentially authorized operation, which of course, when it was authorized, was on a much smaller scale than it was finally ... eventually. But, if I am not mistaken, that was in March of 1960; and I believe that I had assumed the DDP position only in 1959. My guess is that I did receive some kind of a briefing on this early in 1960, and I am sure that I

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must have known at the time about the presidential authorization and the type of operation. Indeed, I seem to remember a conversation with J.C. King, or someone, very soon after that March authorization.

JBP Another of the questions that I would like to try to clarify at this point is the relationship between yourself and J.C. King -- and if you can, any comments about J.C. King's relationship to the Bay of Pigs project. I have had it on both sides -- that he was involved [and] that he was deliberately end-run and, on the other hand, that he was right up to his navel in the whole operation. The papers that I have read indicate that J.C. was fully aware, completely informed, and thoroughly involved.

RB There is no doubt in my mind that that is the case. I was going to say that both of the things that you have heard have an element of truth in them. There was a deliberate decision fairly early in the game -- I doubt if it was early as March, [in fact] I am pretty sure that it wasn't, [but] I am reasonably sure that the decision I speak of was made by some such date as June [1960] -- [that] Esterline would take charge of this project and Esterline would have direct access to me. He would not be under the usual requirement of all the cases going through J.C. King. Now, as the scope and the scale of this operation increased, and with the passage of time, Esterline's direct channel to me came to be more exercised; and there was frequent interchange between Esterline and myself that didn't go through J.C. King in the sense of a command channel. On the other hand, J.C. was brought into all the consultations and was fully informed from the very beginning about this operation. His advice was sought and given, and I usually found it very good and followed it. I remember no specific case where either J.C. King's specific advice or general attitude toward the operation was inconsistent with, or in conflict with, my own.

JBP Why did you make this decision with regard to Jake coming directly to you and not going through King, was it just a matter of greater efficiency or what precipitated that?

RB I think it was in part on the model of the Guatemala operation, and in part I think a feeling, probably on my own part -- in some degree perhaps on the part of Allen Dulles -- that J.C. was not effective enough to handle this kind of very fast moving, quite large scale, quite complex, paramilitary operation.

JBP Do you recall any instances where there was a serious conflict between what Jake wanted to do and what J.C. King thought should be done?

RB I don't remember many, if any, and I believe that the relationships between Jake and J.C. were pretty good throughout.

JBP This seems to be what I have found, that as I say ...

RB It was my recollection.

JBP Was there any political problem that J.C. King had, that is, the affiliation with either one of the major political parties that had ...

RB No. No, nothing of that sort that I can ... oh, no, that never entered my mind.

JBP Was there any relationship between Jake and Vice President Nixon.

RB Nothing that I was aware of. I think I can really say that with quite [?] confidence. I had no ... I don't think that ever entered my mind.

JBP Quite a personal question at this stage of the game, what effect did the Bay of Pigs activity have on your career?

RB Well, it modified it very sharply. Right after, or very soon after ... it was clear to me through McGeorge Bundy first -- and then directly by President Kennedy -- that he [JFK] felt that I could not continue as DDP after that. Then he used a phrase that I have always remembered (and I think that I have quoted it someplace else) when I went to see him myself. He said if this

were a parliamentary government I would have to resign, and you, as a Civil Servant, would stay on; but being the present government that it is, a Presidential Government, I cannot resign and you -- or you and Allen and Pearre -- will have to resign.

JBP So then Kennedy did in effect tell you that you ...

RB Oh, yes.

JBP Out of the Clandestine Service or out of the Agency?

RB Well, it went through two phases. Clearly its initial decision was that Cabell and Dulles should resign -- in effect, retire -- and that I should leave the Agency. However, he was in no hurry, as you know, to have these transactions occur. In fact, I think he didn't want it to occur too precipitously and to look as if it was a quick reaction on his part or a seeking of scapegoats. Then, during the succeeding and the following summer and autumn [of 1961] ... indeed I had occasion a number of times to work on meetings -- small meetings personally with the President -- but I was called up [e.g. telephoned] and in no way during those intervening months did he behave with me or with Allen as if there had been a loss of confidence. In other words, he continued to use us and consult us exactly as he had before. Well, as you know Allen resigned and John McCone came in; and I talked to John. He thought we ought to make the change pretty promptly thereafter, so I resigned as of the end of December [1961]; and then John McCone's first wife died and he called me up from California and said, "please don't make any move. I am not sure if I am going to be able to go on with this task and stay right where you are." He then did come back to Washington in early January [1962] as I remember it, and had hold of himself and took hold of the reins very firmly. Well, by that time, or at that time he went back ... I think in the first instance to Robert Kennedy ... in any event the decision was made -- and it may have been communicated to me through Robert -- but it was with the President's concurrence that John wanted me to stay on and be DS&T. By then both the President

and the Attorney General were very happy to have that ... with that arrangement. But on consideration, I decided that I didn't want to do that. John McCone did urge me strongly, I think that he really wanted me. So in answer to your question (I don't think that it is a very significant point) is that in the first phase, it was to be out of the Agency and in the second phase, it was to be simply a shift in the picture. Then I might say, if it is of any interest, that about a year after that I was offered a job on the White House Staff, working in the Executive Office of the President with presidential approval.

JBP This was the following question -- so you had anticipated it. One other question in terms of the control and management of the Bay of Pigs operation, what about Helms? He was Chief of Operations, and as nearly as I can tell from the papers that I have seen, he sat over here...

RB He did. That is correct. I think he saw most all the cable traffic and I think he was pretty well informed as to what was going on, very well informed; but he was really out of the line of command on this operation. There was something of a tacit agreement between us, that he would be devoting himself to a lot of the other ongoing business of the DDP office, because this was taking a great deal of my time.

JBP This was a tacit agreement, this wasn't a session with you and Helms ...

RB Let me say this was probably not that explicit. I would make an observation here, and I don't want you to infer anything really beyond what it says, it was not particularly easy -- I did not find it particularly easy -- to discuss things clearly and derive a clear understanding with Dick about the division of labor between us when he was my Deputy. I don't imply by this any sense of conflict or rivalry, but he would go ahead and handle certain kinds of matters and I would go ahead and handle certain kinds of matters. We saw one another, of course, all the time. Quite often I would consult him about something that I was handling. I think rather less often he would consult me. I don't mean to imply however in that any kind of concealment from me -- I never had that feeling at all,

but it really was our habit during the whole time that we were in those positions that the division of labor between us was more tacit than explicit.

JBP Shifting to another aspect of the operation ... what was the relationship of William Pawley and other members of the U.S. business community to this activity? Specifically, how did they get involved? I raise this question particularly in view of Tracy Barnes' very great concern, which is apparent in one or two of his memorandums, about being labelled reactionaries -- that what we're doing was supporting a bunch of Cuban reactionaries. But here we find that Pawley and Henry Holland and other businessmen are being called on and asked to finance -- and taking off on their own to do financing -- and support the Cuban groups and one thing or another. And Esterline is very close to this, too, in terms of the Pawley relationship particularly.

RB You remember that Pawley had been involved originally in an earlier phase in an attempt to persuade Batista voluntarily to leave office. I have a dim recollection of the involvement of Holland and Pawley, or of consultations with them, but I am afraid that I don't remember enough to answer your question. I don't really know quite why they were brought in, I think having looked over the memoranda and the like, I am sure you are more clear than I am.

JBP Was Pawley involved in Guatemala? Heavily in the Guatemala area?

RB No I don't believe he was, he was later involved in the Dominican Republic if I am not mistaken.

JBP Well, the reason I ask that is one or two references that he made to participation in ...

RB Holland you remember was Assistant Secretary.

JBP Well, at one point Pawley told Livingston Merchant (in November 1960) that he could run the whole covert operation and he cited the role that he played in Guatemala so again this ...

RB He obviously did something, but I really don't know what he did in Guatemala.

JBP How about E. Howard Hunt ... were you familiar with his role and can you give me any kind of an evaluation of Hunt's role.

RB I don't think ... I remember him perfectly well, I remember he had a role. I think he was brought in ... his previous assignment -- I think it was a brief assignment as Chief of Station of Montevideo. Anyway, he was brought in, and my recollection which is quite dim -- by the way I haven't read his book, [but] I will come back to that in a moment -- but my dim recollection was that he was working on the political side of the operation. By that I mean that he was one of the men who was involved -- how shall I put this -- who was planning and directing the effort to form a reasonably ... a responsible coalition of Cuban exile leaders and to get them to adopt a liberal political platform and that whole set of activities. Now, my recollection is that Howard did not have very many direct contacts with the Cubans, but I could be entirely wrong in that recollection; but it is in that set of activities that I seem to remember him. Now, if you ask me, I can react a little bit, I think, as to what I thought of him at the time. I thought he was reasonably competent in that field. He had a lot of Latin American experience, and was very articulate and a reasonably thoughtful person, and my recollection was that he did what he was asked to do in the operation perfectly competently. It is also my recollection, which I think may be a little bit contrary to some of what he has published, that his was a fairly minor role. Tnat he had a great deal ... I do not remember his presence in the increasingly frequent meetings in my office ... in my office when Esterline would be there. J.C. was almost always there, Tracy Barnes, always there, and perhaps a couple of others were there when we would perhaps be looking over the morning cable traffic, or something of this kind. It seems to me that Howard was rarely at those meetings, which leads me to say that he had a less prominent position in decision making -- far less than Jake, less than Col. Hawkins and Col. Beerli on the military side -- of

course, he wasn't involved with that -- obviously less than Tracy whom I wanted to treat as more or less my deputy in the operations, and less than J.C.

JBP I certainly think that Hunt has very much overstressed his role. In "Give Us This Day" for example, he acts as though he were in the policy business, but my research indicates what you have said about his competence in the area of working with the Cubans at the political level; and the guy seems to have done one hell of a good job with them.

RB I think he did.

JBP He was muy sympatico, knew the language fluently and so, for that, I think he did well. Another question that I would like to put to you, since you have mentioned the military end, the air end in particular, is why did you retain DPD in the position that it was retained in during the course of this operation? DPD was over here on the side, it was betwixt and between; and then, eventually, it came to the point where, well, alright, they are going to sit with us for the Cuban part of the operation but the rest of the DPD is still sitting over here.

RB To go backwards, it was entirely logical to keep the rest of the DPD operation off, elsewhere, that wasn't related to the Cubans. I think you may be asking two questions. Question #1. Given the need for air arm for the Cuban operation, which meant recruiting and providing for the training of Cuban air crews, obtaining the B-26's and all the other equipment, establishing chains of command and control, assigning operations officers, and the whole business of creating an air capability, why use DPD for that? Now I think the answer is that DPD had, over the years, a great deal of experience and I think had developed a very major capability to perform just that kind of task -- that is to create an operational capability including training, acquisition through deviable channels of equipment, [and] relations with the Air Force involved in this kind of task. So I think in that sense it was natural to turn to the top echelons of DPD to ask the operational

air arm. Now, second question ... Why was not Col. Beerli made subordinate to Col. Hawkins for the Cuban operation? I am sure you have come across a recommendation from Hawkins and a memo of mine which I don't remember all that well, and my reasons for not doing so. I think my memorandum probably states them more persuasively and with more detail -- a great deal more than I could from memory today. But having said that I want to make two other remarks in hindsight. Well, I am going to make three remarks, but I think the third of these I regard as highly sensitive; and I wouldn't want this to get circulated. The first remark is, that I think that my judgment in response to what I've distinguished as two different questions ... Why use DDP as the organization to build an air capability and, secondly, in that capacity why not subordinate it to Hawkins. I think my decision on both of those matters was almost certainly influenced by my long association with, loyalty to, DPD and very high regard for the people that operated it. In other words I think I was prejudiced, if you will, in favor of DPD.

JBP Did you know Beerli and Gaines before this.

RB No. But Beerli, remember, had been in DPD by that time, for I think at least 5 years so I had known him in a number of different capacities ... I had known him out in the Nevada test site; I visited him when he was base commander in Ankara, Turkey; he had then been back as operations officer, if I am not mistaken; and then he became the Chief of DPD. I had always regarded him as, perhaps, the best single Air Force officer that moved through that operation in all of its years. Now I had a darn high regard for Beerli. So that's answer No. 1 -- I would admit to probably an element of prejudice on my part. Observation #2 is that with hindsight, I think my first decision still was the right one. Remember that DPD had only absorbed what had been the air operations unit of the old PM staff. And, here, you did have a ready made and a really highly competent organization for the purpose of developing the capability, and I think that to have tried in the short time span of the Cuban operation to have built another organization for that purpose would have been

wasteful and duplicative and delaying itself. I think that was a correct decision on my part. The decision that with hindsight I think is questionable was the failure to subordinate Beerli to Hawkins for air arm. I'm inclined to think that was a mistaken decision as it turned out. Now if you want to know, however, the arguments for it, I seem to remember feeling that that memo I wrote to Hawkins at least set forth the arguments pretty persuasively; and the argument, after all, by analogy was that you do have in the military, theater commanders, but you nevertheless do have an independent air force. I am well aware that this is a subject of certainly decades of debate over this problem in the military, but I did have precedence I think for making them co-equal arms. I still think that hindsight is a mistake. Now the third observation that I want to make about this which is one of my reasons, although only one, for saying ...

JBP This is one we don't want to tape?

RB Well, alright I think perhaps, ... No, I guess it better be on tape ... I just want you to use this with great care. I came to feel very soon in the immediate aftermath of the operation that the most serious mistake in military plans, that is, in the planning of the strictly military phases of the undertaking was in the planning for air support; and I have always felt myself very responsible for that although I think I share that responsibility to a degree -- to a very considerable degree -- with Beerli and to some degree with Hawkins. I have always felt since the operation that if I had done the simple business on the back of an envelope of calculating the turn around time for a single sortie by a B-26 from Nicaragua over the beachhead and back to refuel, I think it gave, oh, somewhere between one and two hours in the target area was the maximum that the fuel supply would permit, as long as they were based back in Central America. That meant that if you had 16 aircraft and 16 aircrews available for a 24 hour period, that you could have coverage by a single B-26 for 32 hours and you could have coveage for two B-26's for 16 hours out of the 24 -- and that's if everything kept going and went right and that every aircrew and every aircraft could be turned around the minute it landed from a mission and refueled. Now those were

preposterously high rates of consumption. So with any realistic view, the forces we had might have been capable of the three strategic strikes originally planned, but it was totally inadequate until it could base forward ... it was plainly inadequate for the second role on which we counted extremely heavily and that is the close-in ground support. I think I could have seen that, if I had done, even the elementary planning. Quite frankly I think Beerli ought to have been saying this loud and clear. And I think that Jack Hawkins ought to have been saying this loud and clear, because if I could do that arithmetic on the back of an envelope so could Jack Hawkins. Jack Hawkins throughout was the man who was saying, you cannot run an amphibious operation unless you have control of the air. Control of the air was on Jack Hawkins mind from the very beginning to the very end, and I think that all three of us goofed on that. The interesting thing is that in Adm. [General] Taylor's inquiry, and in practically all subsequent ones, I have never seen anybody that had picked up what I think was the most serious weakness in our military operational plan.

JBP I have that item down on this question of time over target and how in the hell did this happen? With Beerli, in particular, he was in charge of the air operation and Hawkins, with, as you put it, his continual emphasis on the need for air support ... There are two other parts to this air problem that perhaps we can get into at this point. One is the choice of the B-26 in the particular configuration that they used, and the second thing is the almost complete lack of concern for the T-33's that Castro had. I can't explain either of these things, I don't for example understand why they configured ... unless I have got my information wrong ... they pulled the armor out of these B-26's, they pulled the bottom turret and top turret out, they used a navigator when they had a pilot/co-pilot, they had no protection from the rear end at all on this thing.

RB Jack, I can't help you much on that question. My guess is -- well, there are two answers ... first, they may have ... well, maybe there are several explanations so that -- let me guess at this. They may have felt that

it was impossible to get competent Cuban gunners and therefore there was no point in having gun stations on the aircraft. I do clearly remember that one of the limiting factors in the whole operation was the number of competent Cuban air crews that could be found, recruited, and trained. I remember saying to Beerli that I wished he had a lot more, and he said no point in getting ... we could get more B-26s easily enough, but we don't have the crews to man them and we just can't find them. We're training all the competent Cubans, pilots, co-pilots, air crewmen that we can find, and this is as much of a capability as we are able to develop. So, maybe the fact that they couldn't find any gunners is a partial explanation to point #1. Point #2, maybe they were saving weight in the interest of longer range -- and range was so critical that it could have been a decision to accept the greater risk in the interest of more range. But third, and my hunch is that the third consideration weighed very heavily. The whole strategic concept was that you knock out the Castro airforce on the ground and that by the time the B-26's were (continued on Tape 2.)

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Tape No. 2 of 4

RB (Continued from Tape No. 1) over the beachhead --- were to be active over the beachhead -- they would meet no opposition; and my guess is that this strategic concept may have been responsible for the configuration. Now, as to why B-26 were used in the first place, you will remember that one of the constraints on us was that the aircraft had to be of a type that could plausibly -- might plausibly -- have been acquired other than from the US Government direct. I don't remember whether we had any particular choice of other World War II vintage models.

JBP They wanted A5D's first, and couldn't get them on that basis. I just wonder how hard they tried after it seemed like the word was "no" because they were not available ... but before the operation was over, as I recall, there were some A5D's that were available outside.

RB Well, I don't know, I think I probably have told you as much as I can add to the reasons for that. Now your other question was why was so little attention paid to the T-33's in Cuba. There again, the only logical reason that I can give you was that -- not only the objective but the expectation -- was that they would have been knocked out on the ground. I believe myself -- and here we are getting into one of the controversial questions about the whole operation, but although if all

three strategic strikes had been made at full strength, as originally planned -- there was a good chance that Castro would have had nothing to fly by the time of the landing. It seems to me with hindsight that that was too hazardous a basis for planning. On the other hand, although we may or may not have considered that, and you may find maybe in the written records some indication of a recognition of that risk, my feeling is that we probably felt there wasn't a damn thing we could do about it. Unless it had been to leave the armor and defensive guns on the B-26's. There wasn't any WWII vintage fighter that we could have used for escort purposes as I remember it, because of the range problem.

JBP Well, they pulled some P-51's in at the last minute from Nicaragua and they were going to use those to fly escort and they never got off the ground because it was all over at that time.

RB Well, I don't know the range of the P-51, but I do know that this is a marginal operation, even with the B-26's, and I rather assume that the P-51's wouldn't make it all the way to the beach head.

JBP Maybe. They were expecting them to.

RB They were, well, then I don't understand why they didn't plan on that.

JBP Were you in on the readout of the post-strike photography on the 15 of April -- after they hit the airfield and we knew after they came back and saw some of the post-strike photography that Castro still had some aircraft, including at least one T-33 that they could identify as being untouched, and [that] the runways which they were trying to hole were not impeded at all. Were you aware of this?

RB I was quite aware that there were some aircraft left after that strike, yes, and I assume that I was told the full details.

JBP This is another one of the questions, that having had that readout and then being denied the second strike which was supposed to go -- and they called them [off] at the

last ... well this was your famous exchange of conversation with Rusk [and] Kennedy, you and Cabell -- that we didn't say to hell with it at that point.

RB Well, Jack, remember though that that calling off of the second strike, wasn't, as I remember, until 6 o'clock on Sunday and by that time, I think we thought we were committed. I mean, by this time they were in sight of the Cuban land mass or close to it.

JBP Shifting ground here again in terms of who had the responsibility ... was there ever any thought given as this operation was being mounted to call on the Inter-American Defense Board?

RB I don't think there was thought given to calling on them before the operation ... I mean to involving them in any way in the phase leading up to the operation.

JBP What about Cushman ... in terms of any planning for the operation. I've heard a report which I cannot verify -- I have not talked to Hawkins yet, so I don't know -- that Hawkins and Cushman were quite close.

RB That is quite possible. I don't happen to remember, it is very possible.

JBP So to your knowledge Cushman was not involved in any of the planning.

RB It is conceivable that Hawkins talked to him informally about it, but I think that is the only way.

JBP What about Lyndon Johnson, was he ever involved in any of the discussions prior to the operation -- he was in on at least one briefing.

RB It seems to me that he was in on a briefing, and it seems to me that at that briefing he expressed a negative feel about the operation.

JBP I would like to shift now from the military business to this question that I cannot answer, and I think that you probably are the only man around who can ... the question of the assassination business. Aside from what

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you have already told the committees and that has appeared in newspapers, books, etc. do you have anything that you want to add about the assassination program. Specifically, my question is, was there a plot to assassinate Castro during the course of the Bay of Pigs operation. The only evidence that I find of that in the written record is the supply of silenced arms that turn up time and time again -- Welrod pistols, silenced submachine guns, one reference from Livingston Merchant back early in the game, where he said, why don't we take direct action against Castro, Raul Castro, and Che Guevara, and Cabell intercedes and explains to him the dangers of this kind of program. And then the other thing that I have found that I don't understand is a "Must-go-list" which lists practically everybody except Fidel Castro. And a reference to an AMHINT program.

RB Well, Jack let me tell you what I can about this, which isn't much. There really is very little I can add to the testimony that is before the Church committee and that has received all the publicity they've had. You probably know about as much as I do about the Mabey operation ... we will call it that, the Mafia operation. Most of all I recollect about that comes from the IG report prepared at Helms's instruction in '68, and if I hadn't read that I would be very much vaguer on the whole thing ... I am sure you have access to that.

JBP No. I haven't read that one yet. No.

RB Well, it will give you more information than I could. But there are questions that are still vague -- several questions that are still vague and I think that will always be unanswered about that operation -- having to do with the authority for it. Putting together what I remember and what I read in the course of the Church Committee hearings, this is something that started in December of '60. I remember an initial session with Shef Edwards, I don't know who originally had the notion that it might be possible to work through, or in some way with, or in a supporting role with the Mafia. Shef apparently did bring this idea to me to the best of my recollection. I told him that I thought this was something that we certainly ought to look into. Is there

a capability? What would be involved? In other words, I encouraged him, although Shef didn't work for me, to go ahead. Shef has testified, or did, in that IG report that he and I met with Allen, and I think Pearre, in September of '60 on this matter and Shef in his testimony said "no bad words were used." Meaning I'm sure that he slightly doubled talked what might be done. In any event, Allen presumably approved that at that time. Now the Church Committee Staff called to question whether such a session with Allen was ever held. They had looked at his calendar for that month and they don't find it on the calendar, however, I am quite unconvinced of that, I seem to remember, although I couldn't have placed it precisely -- that precisely in time -- a session where Shef and I talked to Allen. One reason that I am sure that such a session took place, is that Shef, as you know, was under ... in the line of command with Red White, Col. White. I don't think Col. White was ever told this. So Shef was not acting in his regular chain of command, and I am quite certain that he would not have gone forward without Allen's knowledge and sanction. Now, it then did go forward; and I believe the IG report indicates that two successive attempts were made, in one case I think some pills or something were forwarded to a Mafia agent in Cuba who had been in the Castro entourage. By the time they reached him he had already been pushed off to a more remote position. No attempt was made, nothing ever came of it. Then I think some emissary was sent from Miami late, and I think nothing was ever heard of that again. I was, of course, as I told you, I was aware of that, but all of this was done during that period by Shef or the man -- his name is a matter of record -- who handled the direct contacts with Maheu. It was one of Shef's people. So Shef would occasionally let me know what was going on. In effect, he and his immediate subordinate were case officers for that activity; and I don't think anybody else [was] involved. I think probably Tracy may have known about it, but I don't think anybody else involved with the Bay of Pigs operation knew anything about it, whatever. My recollection is that it never went to the Special Group, and that is the view of Bundy.

JBP I don't find any evidence...

RB And also Tom Parrott. I am just reasonably certain that it was never mentioned in the Special Group. Now what I have testified to the committee is that I do not think Allen would have allowed it to go forward unless he had satisfied himself in some way that the President would not have wanted to hear of it. But that is a surmise. I don't really think anybody has been able to go further than that.

JBP As I say, nothing shows up in the records.

RB Now, to come back to your question, I don't remember, I have no recollection that any specific other plot against Castro during this period from the BOP operation was in preparation. I do remember my own feeling that the Mafia plot had a very modest chance of success and that it was not something to be depended on in any way. I don't remember others. I do believe ... well, I have a dim recollection we were trying up to a point in the autumn to carry out infiltration of individuals. Primarily these were intended to be Agency communicators. I believe there was talk of at least one project that involved a light aircraft and a landing in Oriente on a highway and the individuals again had some silent weapons ... I don't happen to remember that. It wouldn't surprise me at all if this kind of activity ...

JBP There were so many of the silenced weapons that were being called for, that this struck me as the normal sort of request that you could expect in an operation like this rather than any massive plan to try to kill Castro. Does the name Howard F. Anderson ring any bell with you ... he was reported executed by Castro as a counterrevolutionary on 19 April 1961.

RB It doesn't happen to, but there were several ...

JBP This was after the failure ...

RB Right after.

JBP Yes, the 19th was when they surrendered. Do you have any recollection about the training of the brigade in terms of the adequacy of the training and the caliber

of the trainees, I am speaking specifically of both the ground troops and the air troops. In looking back, do you feel that these Cubans were really ready to go and adequately trained.

RB Well, Jack, I relied on, mainly on -- well, wholly on reports from in the first instance, Col. Gray and the JCS Review Group's inspection. I guess I relied also on reports coming through in the traffic. I think everyone was quite influenced by Col. Hawkins' famous cable of the 13th of April.

JBP Was that a set up?

RB You mean did he send that in order to influence action ...

JBP Or was he asked to send that.

RB Oh, he was asked to send a report, yes. He was sent down for the purpose of sending a report. I don't think anybody asked him to -- and I don't think he would have been willing to -- send a report that he wouldn't stand behind, although he, like all the rest of, us was deeply involved in the operation. Now, I think he, Hawkins, was the man who made an earlier visit to the training camp, I am pretty sure he was the one, but what sticks in my mind is an eyewitness account of some military man that had just come back from there, and had observed a day or more of training, I still remember him talking of the brigade information and singing marching songs and talking in the evening with them. And whoever -- I think this was Jack Hawkins -- but whoever it was really came back with a very strong impression of their high morale and sense of unity. I also remember reports that related to the relationship of the brigade to political figures. This was the time remember when a lot of the politicos wanted to go down and visit the Brigade, and the reports that we were getting back ... I think this was not Hawkins, I think this was whoever was the senior CIA trainer.

JBP Egan?

RB Probably. In charge of the training. Saying that ... arguing strongly that if the politicians came down there, they would create disunity in the Brigade, that the personnel of the brigade had no particular respect for the politicos and certainly no unified political allegiance to one of them. The impression I remember receiving was that the brigade was not made up of sub-groups, each with fierce loyalties, but that they were a fairly non political group of people. Also, I remember forming the impression from the whole flow of reports that they were highly motivated. That this was predominantly a middle class group, because it was mostly middle class people that had left Cuba. That they were therefore ... there were quite a number of them with good education, most of them educated, intelligent; and I remember maybe it was that April 13 cable of Hawkins, or maybe it was an earlier one, but I remember Hawkins making an oral report to me and saying in some respects that this brigade had higher firepower per man than a comparable US formation.

JBP This was Hawkins. This was in his memo of the 13th.

RB I see. So, the impression I formed was that both the human raw material was excellent and certainly their equipment was excellent; that they were considered to be pretty well trained and to have high morale.

JBP Did you ever observe any of the training yourself? Did you ever get down there?

RB Never went down there.

JBP Never went down there? Because there was some speculation that one of the Americans they saw down there was you, and I couldn't find any evidence that you had gone down.

RB No, I never went down.

JBP How much ... you mentioned in the ...

RB Could I ask you, Jack, at this point ... do you find in the written material you have seen, the basis for a contrary impression?

JBP I have a very contrary impression and this is why I was just about to ask ... how much of the cable traffic did you read? Because it strikes me that in reviewing the cable traffic you would find that there was a great deal of dissension within the ranks of both the ground forces, and in terms of the Air Force, and that it had to do with political idealogy and this gets back to the question that Halperin raised in the material that you sent me that he says the political infighting was up here [in the US], and it had no impact on the brigade. My view is really quite to the contrary on the basis of just reading cable traffic, and Alejos who was sitting down there where these guys were training made the suggestion which came forward in one of the cables that these guys should be shipped out or shot and if you shoot them, bury them deep ... and this was something, that went on not only early in the game but late in the training period.

RB By these guys, you mean a small minority?

JBP No. It would pop up at various times, it might be two or three guys at a time, another time it was a hundred men who were walking out or sitting over here.

RB I have a dim recollection of at least one such incident, and if I am not mistaken a few were ...

JBP Some went over the hill too.

RB But also, a few were taken and detained up in Petén.

JBP Eighteen of them.

RB Eighteen - yeah. Well, I told you that I obviously didn't read the cable traffic in as much detail I guess then, as you are now. I suppose the impression I have just outlined to you is pretty heavily influenced by Hawkins. Well, Hawkins, I am quite sure did make that earlier trip down there, to the training site.

JBP Yeah. He was down there ...

RB Maybe it was more than once. You also had ...

JBP Of course Egan was up . . .

RB Egan was up. General Gray had been down there at least once, I think.

JBP I don't recall it.

RB Well you remember ...

JBP I remember that the JCS sent Tarwater and two other lieutenant colonels went down there.

RB The head of that little group was then Colonel now, General Gray. Didn't he go down himself?

JBP I don't recall if he did.

RB Well, nevertheless the JCS sent people down, and I was relying, I suppose, on the flow from all of these individuals that we have just mentioned. And I am a little surprised ... let me put it this way, I don't see why Jack Hawkins would have had a motive, perhaps he would have, by the 13th of April, but I don't see why he would have had a motive earlier in the game, for misrepresenting the state of training or the cohesiveness of that unit insofar as it was known to him.

JBP This is, of course, the problem. How about the blinders on the man by the time you are so heavily involved. . .

RB I can see that affecting what he said on the 13th of April, but I am much less clear about why that would have effected him on the earlier visit. Also, he must have seen Egan when Egan was up here, and I am quite surprised at the ... also I would assume that Hawkins, at least, would have read the cable traffic relating to military training with great care, that was his business. I can't conceive that a man in charge of military planning and other things military ... and the direction of military operations wouldn't read every report that he could get his hands on the state of readiness of the troops.

JBP This is the part that ...

RB You are going to see Jack Hawkins, aren't you.

JBP The way these guys are playing games with the travel money, I don't know what the hell is going on.

RB Where is Hawkins now?

JBP Hawkins and Egan are both in Colorado. One is in Fort Collins, I believe that is Egan; and Hawkins is in Colorado Springs ...

RB Are they on active duty?

JBP No, they are both retired, and Beerli is out in Washington, Portland or some place like that, up in the West.

RB I would like very much to see Jack Hawkins, again ... I must say, I haven't seen him for a great many years now and I had a very high regard for him. I hope you get to see him and preferably both of them.

JBP I want to see Beerli, Hawkins, and Egan ... I want to see all three of them.

RB Because on this point they are the people who could throw some light. All I can say for myself is that for whatever -- as an historical fact -- that I believe at the time I pretty much believed what Hawkins said in his April 13 memo.

JBP Do you recall whether there were any serious plans to either evacuate the brigade or provide any sort of an escape route out of the Zapata peninsula at the time of the operation? Hawkins had a contingency plan and then there was talk very briefly about dispersal, but my feeling is that there was no serious thought up at the Headquarters end ...

RB That is correct.

JBP ... about anybody doing anything except staying there.

RB That is correct.

JBP On the broad outline that I showed you when we started out here, I raised a question about participation in foreign policy. I don't know enough about how the operations worked in Guatemala, but it struck me that

with this Bay of Pigs activity, the Department of State bowed out and that the CIA was making US foreign policy. Jake Esterline was dealing directly with Ydigoras Fuentes. Rip Robertson was dealing with Somoza on problems that really affected the United States. Was this of any concern to us? It was in excess of our charter responsibility.

RB I think it probably was of concern. Let me say this ... my feeling is that Tom Mann was kept awfully close to everything -- at least Jake Esterline did in dealing with [Ydigoras] Fuentes. With Rip you could never be sure. I am very fond of him and a great admirer of his, but the niceties of consultation with political authorities, was not one of his strong suits, and it wasn't in Guatemala either, as you know. The clearest case to me of the CIA effecting directly negotiations with another Chief of State was Ydigoras. I think that was frankly unavoidable and inescapable, because we had almost constant problems of a kind of operational nature. Here, we were training a force that Jack Hawkins once characterized to me as the most powerful military force from Mexico to Colombia in his [Ydigoras's] country. He himself faced a lot of domestic opposition at one time when they went to overthrow him as you remember, and he wanted to get this group out of there as soon as possible and I am sure that you have seen a lot of the traffic and memoranda of discussion but it seems to me really to characterize especially the period in November-December (1960) when Tom Mann wanted to get the brigade the hell out of Guatemala and we would have been ... Ydigoras would have welcomed it. There was no place for them to go. I still remember that we even talked about ferrying them to that training site that the Agency had in Saipan, which was a measure of the desperation, or desperate desire to get them out of there. We talked again about trying to find a remote site in the continental US, but Tom Mann with the State Department would have none of that. Well, in that period when sort of constant operational problems with Ydigoras -- and these all wrapped up in the larger question of where this training activity can be carried on, and how can it be made less obtrusive, etc. -- I think it was just inevitable that Agency representatives be dealing -- found themselves dealing -- directly with Ydigoras.

Now you may or may not have come across in the traffic an incident that I remember with some vividness, but I was called up by the Watch Officer at about 2:30 in the morning, and a cable had come in I think from Egan; and Ydigoras had asked to borrow some of the brigade to put down an uprising in Puerto Barrios. Egan wanted an answer within an hour or something of that kind. I did, at that hour in the morning, get in touch with Tom Mann; but I could get no decision out of Tom Mann. He said he couldn't possibly act on a matter of that kind until he could see the Secretary in the morning. So here, again, you have Ydigoras levying a request on an Agency representative locally, under circumstances and with a time schedule that, as it turned out, made effective reference to the State Department just impossible. The State Department was not equipped to decide something like that within an hour ...

JBP Do you know whether we used the troops or not.

RB I have always been a little confused about that. I know that I sent a cable to Egan saying "yes" on my responsibility; and my reasons for doing that very definitely at the time were that I didn't think that decision ought to be left to Egan.

JBP The story I gathered from cable traffic is that we actually loaded them up on C-46's and they touched down and the troops never got out.

RB That is what I understand, too.

JBP Alejos, later on, after the first of the year in 1961 made reference to the fact that the revolt had been put down by indigenous troops that were used. Could we talk now, about this changing concept, the transition from GW to invasion. Let me read something to you that you may or may not recall. That in preparing for a DCI/DDP briefing of Kennedy on 17 November 1960, the notes on the pre-DDP staff meeting of 15 November ruled out, and I quote "our original concept" and "our second concept" (1500-3000 man force to secure a beach with an airstrip). "This now seemed unachievable, except as a joint Agency/DOD action." "Our Guatemala experience

demonstrates that we cannot staff and otherwise timely create the base and lift needed." And the memo goes on to say that the current concept is a 600 man force to land by LST, move inland to mountains where others might rally round and be supplied by airdrop. This 600 man force, by LST and airdrop, etc. was very similar to the plan proposed by Tom Mann in February 1961, and rejected in very positive terms. The Zapata plan, as it actually transpired, was this second concept we are ruling out back here in November of 1960.

RB Whose is this memo?

JBP This is a memo without any identification but the attendees are listed as Bissell, Barnes, King, Jake, Eisemann, Hawkins, Gains and Beerli. On one hand we are saying in November that we can't do it, with a force of 1500-3000 men because we can't get the lift, etc., etc., but 5 months later ... within the period of a month actually ... we are on the path of 700-800-1500 man brigade going in by ship.

RB Yes, yes. The timing of this surprises me a bit. Let me speak of it, and comment on this: According to my recollection, and I suspect you can write this more accurately than I can remember it, the operation from its beginning went through a series of phases. I am quite clear that in the spring of 1960, the plan was to train 20 odd Cubans in that camp in the Canal Zone. That these once trained, were themselves to be trainers so that a larger group of Cubans -- I have been asked several times, what kind of a group were we thinking that they in turn would train and I would say I don't know, but I would sort of guess it might have been a hundred odd. It probably wouldn't have been much smaller number than that ... it could have been 100-150. It was certainly clear to me that at that stage, we were training primarily agents for infiltration. I would characterize the concept as I remember it, and as it stood during the summer as follows: That by infiltrating a sizable number (i.e., perhaps a hundred or more -- a sizable number) of trained, loyal agents of (we hope) established loyalty, who were trained specifically in communication, in guerrilla tactics and techniques, sabotage, and similar ... and who owed some sort of discipline to the organization ... that by infiltrating them, and placing them where various dissident groups in the island, groups perhaps like some of the students

in Havana University, who were opposition groups, but not engaging in any active resistance, but also placing them with groups in the Escambray and elsewhere that were engaging in active resistance, that we would be able to build up a classic underground net in the island. My conception of an underground net is that it doesn't necessarily involve very large numbers of people, but it does involve at least a network of disciplined individuals with proper compartmentation between themselves -- so that when one that [sic] was picked up it didn't blow the entire thing -- with the means of communication, with the capability with some safehouses, etc. and a capability therefore to receive supplies and to receive infiltrated agents, and give them shelter and enable them to move from one part of the island to another. Indeed, a lot of the characteristics of the undergrounds in World War II, in Europe. The concept was, that it would be possible over a period of months to build up this kind of a classic underground in Cuba, and that most of the thrust of ultimate opposition to Castro leading to his overthrow would come from such internal underground. Now it is perfectly clear that by January, that concept had been totally abandoned. The phases of the shift I think are not only less clear in my memory, but I think they were a good deal less clear as they occurred, although it was perfectly clear by January that we had made a complete shift. Essentially, my recollection and impression of what happened was that first, the whole training schedule got slipped several months, so that we did not have by early September a cadre of even 40-50 trained agents ready for infiltration. They weren't ready till a good year later. Secondly, we more and more learned that what was to be in the original conception an important element of the underground -- mainly the alleged followers of exile political leaders, each of whom said he had a large following in the island that would rise at command. This turned out to be virtually non-existent, or to be so amophorous as to be useless for this purpose. A distinction that lots of people don't draw, but that is critical, is a distinction between reasonably disciplined, security conscious, compartmented members of an underground and merely an amorphous body of people who would vote through the opposition -- if they had a chance to vote. The latter may become important after an uprising is moving

along, but it is absolutely of no importance in the earlier stages. I think that we learned that those resources were in the form ... in which they could have been useful to build an underground were nonexistent. The more we learned about active dissident groups in Escambray and elsewhere, the more it appeared that these were small, virtually powerless, primitive groups, the leadership of which, and the loyalty of which, were very difficult to ascertain. We learned to our sorrow that the internal opposition, such as it was, was so little organized, had such poor means of communication, was so lacking in things like safe houses, means of passing agents along, that agent infiltration was extremely difficult. I think the total numbers that we had attempted to infiltrate -- let's say from the first of September (1960) through to January (1961) -- if I had to guess, I would guess that it probably wasn't in excess of 20 or 25; and that might be on the high side. Of those my guess would be at least half were picked up within 12 or 24 hours. The whole scheme of building an internal underground was by late autumn, quite apparently aborted. The other side of the coin is that Castro's militia were extremely numerous. I remember the strategy around the Escambray was in effect to surround the area and starve these people out instead of trying to go in after them; and that this was quite effective. His internal security was becoming distinctly better during this period, so I am reasonably clear in my mind about the starting concept, and I am reasonably clear in my mind about the final concept, but I think it is very difficult to pin down the exact timing of the change and also I think that it is difficult to identify except perhaps from this statement you have just quoted, an intermediate stage, that there was a stage when heavy reliance was still being placed in concept on the underground, but where it was felt that a landing by 50 to 100 or more would detonate the uprising by the underground. But I have the feeling that at least by the end of November it was increasingly apparent that if you were going to accomplish anything you were going to have to place reliance on the force that was landed and not of any resources in being in the act.

JBP You are on record as of November saying almost exactly just what you have said, that you were aware of the

fact that these resistance elements were not going to be available to you, etc. With this in mind, then, how could you then continue to go forward with such a small force in being, as you had by April (1960) -- 1,500 men. You were aware, as you point out, of the increase in security of Castro, his emphasis on -- or were you in fact, aware of his emphasis on -- the training of the militia, the alert that they had in January, at the time of the Kennedy takeover (he alerted his militia) [and] that he began to train them from that point on? The NIE's were saying that the militia was getting better and better. [And there was] still

(continued on Tape 3.)

Transcript of Oral Interview of

Mr. Richard M. Bissell, Jr.

by Jack B. Pfeiffer

Farmington, Connecticut

17 October 1975

on the Bay of Pigs Operation

Tape No. 3 of 4

JBP ...the clear realization, if they are not going to get any help from the locals.

RB At least right away.

JBP Yes, at least right away, ... this gets me, I don't know... Did you in fact as the DDP ever request a study of the success of Castro's own programs within Cuba? His military program? His indoctrination program, etc. I don't find any record of that.

RB I don't think I ever requested that Jack, but I think I did follow the NIE's very closely. It seems to me that near the end there was a special NIE called for, and I don't remember it too well; but I remember when I read that Special one -- and Allen likewise read it -- that it seemed to me that it was, as an estimate...it was consistent with what we had believed or felt and what we were assuming about the state of affairs in the island, and the support that we would or wouldn't get. Now, you, I am sure have seen that estimate. Let me go back a bit and answer the question that started you in this direction, and I will make only two comments on it.

One of the clearest impressions I have of the whole planning period and of this change in concept, was that by November...I am very

pleased with what you told me that there's a record of my having made more or less this speech then because I distinctly remember that increasingly this was my personal view. I would talk it to Esterline and Hawkins, and I don't think Esterline bought this view, either as completely or as soon as I did. That is my impression. I remember the feeling that I was well ahead of King, perhaps -- certainly Jake -- in my belief that we had to place nearly exclusive reliance for the initial phase on whatever force it was possible to land. So, I also remembered very clearly -- and I think as early as November where I think there were probably under 500 people in the brigade in training -- I remember repeatedly saying to Hawkins and Esterline that if we are really going to have to place this heavy reliance on a landing force, this is an altogether preposterously inadequate number; we need two or three times that. I remember being told, first of ... well I remember two things...I remember being told that well, people did not see how it would be feasible to get up to the size I was talking about in the time period; but secondly I was...I have a clear recollection...I wish you if you would get to see Jack Hawkins, you would ask him about this...that I have a clear recollection that he had a lesser sense of urgency at that point about a buildup in numbers than I did. I felt that I was consistently urging upon Hawkins the necessity of a larger buildup than the plans then contemplated, and I also remember at a later stage in a somewhat similar fashion urging upon Beerli the necessity of a significantly larger air arm than his plans contemplated. Now to a degree, I think what both Beerli and Hawkins...I know what Beerli was...remember I already told you ...the major part of Beerli's report was that we needed all the air crews we could get. I think Hawkins likewise felt that he had to rely on what the recruiting mechanism would turn up, which wasn't really his direct operation, and that he wasn't at all sure that he could get the sort of numbers that I was talking about. But I do remember an awareness of what seemed to me to be the inadequacy of our resources in the light of an altered concept of the operation.

JBP There was one other constraint on it too, which comes through quite loud and clear and that is just the mere physical facilities that were available at the training base, to the point that even as early as November, there were occasions when they had to hold up on the recruits that they were picking up in Miami; and certainly later on in the game this became quite apparent. Then there was the other problem too, which you point out and that Hawkins mentioned, whether they could get the numbers of recruits that they wanted because the Cubans were not necessarily rushing to join up by the late stage of the game.

RB Now, finally, Jack, I think you could ask the question, or put the question this way...in November it was probably still perfectly plausible -- recognizing, as at least I did, the changed character of the strategic concept and recognizing the then inadequacy of our resources -- it was probably still plausible to hope that we could develop more or less adequate forces...forces more nearly adequate for the task. Now that suggests a question -- come, say March 1961 -- when with all the pressures to get out of Guatemala on the one hand and with the seasonal factor, which was so important for timing on the other hand...in the light of those it was by March perfectly apparent that if we were going to do it at all, it was going to have to be within weeks. That meant that the resources we had were the resources...all we were going to have, and the question why didn't we of our own initiative at that point, say, "Look, given the present strategic concept, the forces are not sufficient." Why didn't we cancel? Well, I think the answer probably...essentially...certainly an important element of the answer is the obvious one--that we were psychologically and every other way committed to this operation and didn't take a wholly objective judgment. I will however, make this defensive -- personally defensive -- remark, that by March, Jack Hawkins was...seemed very confident of our ability to carry out what I call the first phases of the operation successfully. And by the first phase, I mean the consolidation of the beachhead, as planned, which means control of causeways, consideration of the beachhead; and I know, at least for myself, that his confidence -- we had a very good chance of doing that, of achieving that degree of success -- had a lot of influence on me. Now here, I am going to refer to the Halperin thesis -- and I have looked up what you wrote me about it -- and in one sense it is perfectly obvious that the concept of this operation was not just psychological warfare. I don't think anybody had the slightest question that there wasn't a chance of success, unless this initial military operation, the seizure and consolidation of the beachhead could be accomplished. I think that that has to be looked at, strictly as a military operation. I think you are right in saying -- as Allen has testified and I have and everybody else -- we didn't look for any help from the locals in that phase. It frankly never occurred to me that we would get *even* one local recruit until we had consolidated the beachhead, probably held it against at least one attack attempting to dislodge the brigade, and pretty well demonstrated that it could be held at least for a very significant period of time. However, the phase that Halperin described, that sort of a thing was what I, for one, looked to as the second phase of the operation. I think that you probably know that

my own speculation was that we could really have a secure beachhead and operate aircraft from there -- having no air opposition that we could enormously confuse and disorganize the Castro regime. The microwave telephone links were perfectly good targets. They could have been taken out. We could have done quite a lot with key bridges and transportation facilities. We did, as you know have plans for a smaller landing in -- I think it was in Oriente -- that was never meant to accomplish anything in a military sense, but diversionary, and the sequence of events that I foresaw as the possible one was that if this state of affairs could be drawn out for something like a week or more, and you had a beachhead that couldn't be dislodged, that that might have been the time to press, through diplomatic channels, for a cease fire and a supervised election. Jack Hawkins used to talk about issuing from the beachhead in the military sense, and I always thought that was for the birds because I didn't see us building up a big enough force, even over a period of several weeks in the beachhead to make that a good bet. But, to finish off on the Halperin thesis...I think my summary of my own recollection is that it was very clear that in the first strictly military phase -- what Halperin describes, rather eloquently -- is what in my mind was a possible second phase.

JBP Give you time to decide which uniform to pull out of the closet...

RB Yes,

JBP Well, let me try another aspect of...

RB Have I said anything that is useful on this matter of change in concepts? Is there anything else that you want to ask about?

JBP What you have said, reinforces the impression that I had about your feeling in terms of support from without and also this comment that I think you are quite correct about Hawkins...I think that Hawkins was gung ho, and it is quite apparent that he had something more, or would like to have had something more in mind than sitting in this enclave on the beach.

RB But that is an issue that we obviously didn't have to meet.

JBP The other part about this problem of sitting there for a period of even a week, seems to me to be part of this question I raised with you before about an objective study of the Castro forces and particularly the feeling that seemed to hold even at the time that you sent

may made the difference on the ground would have been a half dozen Rip Robertsons to provide direction and leadership and strengthen morale, and of course if as you say the Brigade's was less...personnel were divided and incompetent then I believe at the time all the more a little stiffening -- I mean "US observers" on the ground might have been quite important. But the place where they could have made a really critical difference was as many US aircrews as we could conveniently recruit and some better air equipment.

JBP Another question along this line of equipment etc...we had the two vessels, the two armed escort vessels, the BARBARA J. and the BLAGAR where they had the communication and the control etc. Each of these vessels had, as I recall eleven .50 caliber machine guns and a few 75 mm recoiless rifles. At no point in the game did these two vessels function as anti-aircraft vessels. They were 20 or 25 miles out after they participated in the initial landing, which strikes me as rather strange concept here, where we had limited aircraft. Although we had these two things that were really quite heavily capable of anti-aircraft firing, in fact they had driven off Castro's guys in the morning when they tried to take them.

RB I have no idea.

JBP We never got into any anti-aircraft consideration on this thing at all, and it strikes me...

RB I simply cannot understand that. I wish you would ask Jack Hawkins and sometime I am going to come in and see you, after you have seen Jack Hawkins.

JBP After I have seen Jack Hawkins, I will be glad to let you know what he said. A question now, about Tracy Barnes, and a question about Adlai Stevenson and the first airstrike, and Tracy Barnes's role in the Stevenson activity. Do you know if Barnes actually briefed Stevenson on the upcoming airstrike, on that strike on the 15th of April?

RB When did Tracy go up and see him? It was on a Saturday morning -- the strike was on a Saturday morning.

JBP Barnes was up in New York the week before that, say on the 6th or 7th of April and Hunt in his book is quite specific about Barnes

having briefed Stevenson and Barnes having written a memo for the record of this meeting which he, Barnes, gave to Lyman Kirkpatrick. I have checked high and low and looked for such a memo of anything of Barnes' that made reference to these. I can't find a Goddamned thing.

RB Now let me ask you, Hunt alleged that this memo was given to Kirkpatrick then, at that moment.

JBP That's right.

RB Circumstantially, I think Hunt is crazy, and the reason I say this is Lyman obviously knew in a vague way that this whole thing was going on. It was too big an operation for anyone with ears as sensitive as his not to pick up, but he was not officially cleared or briefed in on this operation ahead of time, as the IG was not really...not supposed to be anyhow. It is almost inconceivable to me, that had Tracy written such a memo that he would have given a copy to Lyman, almost inconceivable.

JBP I would like to ask you if you could give me some evaluations in terms of your own experience, with the roles that were played by the people in the Kennedy administration including the President himself and on down the line, his brother, if his brother was involved, Rusk, Tom Mann, Bundy and some of these people.

RB Adolf Berle.

JBP What about Berle? I was over at Hyde Park and went through the Berle diaries here the earlier part of the week. One comment that seemed to surprise me, was...I think it was in December of 1960, although you can't tell from the pieces of paper that are in the Berle diaries...Berle makes reference to J. C. King...he wants to get in touch with J. C. King; and he said I called Bissell, and this embarrassed King because Bissell was King's boss. The impression one gets is that you did not know that J. C. King was dealing with Berle or had any contacts with Berle and were somewhat surprised about it.

RB It is conceivable that I would have known that J. C. might have worried I don't remember the incident and worrying about that, and of course, we had a lot of dealings with Berle. I don't know whether you were asking about roles or whether you were asking about attitudes, or both.

JBP It is a combination of both.

RB We had worked of course, all during the autumn, I suppose all through the history operation, well, not all, because Tom Mann came in as Assistant Secretary, I have forgotten when, but from the time he came in, in any case, as Assistant Secretary, I have forgotten when, but from the time he came in, in any case, as Assistant Secretary, he knew all that was going on, and he was the contact point in the State Department. I had formed a great deal of admiration, a very high regard, for Tom Mann. I probably already referred to some of the problems in which he was most directly involved in the autumn and he was very worried about the presence of the Brigade in Guatemala. He was not, I think, during that stage, he was not opposed to the whole idea of the operation. I think for a Foreign Service Officer, Tom Mann tended to be an activist rather than the reverse, I also thought as a Foreign Service Officer he was rather pro-agency, as distinct from those that were rather agin' the agency and jealous of it. I never felt any of that with Tom Mann. To some degree -- or to considerable degree -- I shared his concern, and I think we all did, with the location in Guatemala. It was just that we didn't know where else we could turn. I was a little more unhappy, I think, probably about the adamant refusal to consider a location in the CONUS -- because although that would have involved, perhaps, a greater risk of a seeming US connection, it also would have been much easier to control. There are plenty of military areas in the southern part of the US that could be rendered very remote and totally inaccessible, and I think that might have been ... .

JBP Where did the principal opposition to this come from?

RB Well, I think from the State Department, although the President may also have shared it, but I don't...well, pre-Kennedy I don't know, I think it came from the State Department essentially. It was part of the business of maintaining the deniability. That was another cost that was paid for this objective of deniability. When it came up to the decision Tom Mann finally voted Yes; and Tom Mann, after the fact, was always extremely generous and never said that he felt it had been a false decision. He never to my knowledge, never, denied that he had favored it, and never in other words tried to avoid responsibility. Adolf Berle was really much the same. My recollection is that he may have been brought down almost for the purpose of helping...I don't think this was true, I don't know where Kennedy had known him, I think he came down as something of a Kennedy

protege and into the Department. But in any event, he soon became very active, not face to face, but in the dealings with the Cuban political leaders, attempting to achieve some cohesiveness and attempting to persuade them to adopt a reasonably liberal platform. Again, I think the record is clear that in the final analysis, he voted for it; and Adolf, likewise, after the event -- I remember a few days after -- he sought me out and he said I want to say to you that I voted for this, and I don't go back on that in any way. He said I actually think we are better off having tried and failed, than if we hadn't. Both of these men, this was not just on a personal level, I think that they did accept a legitimate and appropriate share in the responsibility.

JBP Yes, Berle I think was quite an activist because after the election in '60, in his diaries, made comment to the effect that if there was going to be any direct action, that the time perhaps to do it is in the interregnum between the two presidencies here.

RB Yes, he was quite an activist. Now, Rusk himself was not. Rusk was always afraid of this operation. I don't [think he got his values ?] quite right. Rusk was all for a powerful guerrilla effort -- anything to be done along that line. But he consistently argued for reducing the sound level, and as you know this had everything to do with abandoning the TRINIDAD site, although I never myself thought that was a bad decision. I don't think it even made the military problem much more serious. It did however, make it much more difficult to conceive of a landing leading to an established guerrilla group, simply because the TRINIDAD site would have been right next to the Escambray and that was not true, of course of the Bay of Pigs site. Rusk's influence always was avoid the noisy actions. Do everything you can not to make this look like an invasion. Make it look like a guerrilla landing. Make it look more like Castro's original operation in Oriente. And as I think it is a matter of record that his opposition or his recommendation was what led to the cancellation of the second airstrike. I am sure that his opposition contributed to the cancellation of the original plan's second of three airstrikes. I want to say also, though, that Rusk, after the fact, was always generous. He never said, I told you so, at least to my knowledge or in any report that has ever reached me. Well, let's see, who else was in that circle. Paul Nitze was often at those meetings -- he was not a terribly active participant in them, and the same thing is true of McNamara.

JBP What about Kennedy himself. Rely on Rusk basically?

RB Yes, he relied on Rusk and he also -- of course, I think he was much influenced by the JCS Review Group...if you remember he instituted it; and I think he was duly impressed with its findings. Jack Hawkins used to come to those meetings quite often, so the President saw him in meetings a number of times; and I think he was relying a bit on Hawkins' judgment too, on the 6th fleet military feasibility. The Attorney General was briefed into it at a fairly late stage. I'm sure after that that the President consulted him often. I got the impression that Robert Kennedy was neither pro nor con, and that perhaps a little bit more objective, a little more remote from it than the President, and perhaps had more doubts about it than the President. But I don't think that he was urging the President to cancel it, nor do I particularly think he was urging the President to go forward with it, but I don't know that...pure speculation.

JBP I have another reference here, this is in March 1961 when the subject was a JMATE meeting with DDP. The DDP said that the Special Group was being reconstituted and would hold its third meeting on the 2nd of March -- you will recall the Special Group worked during Eisenhower, then Kennedy came in and they dropped it off -- and then "The DCI had indicated some desire to brief the group at that meeting regarding recent operational developments. Mr. Bissell readily accepted the suggestion that reintroduction of the Special Group into the field of JMATE operations was to be discouraged to the extent possible. He will therefore seek to dissuade the DCI from including JMATE in the 2 March meeting." I wonder if you can explain why you were opposed to getting the Special Group back...

RB I simply felt that between the periodic meetings in the White House, which were quite long and very slow, and exhaustive discussion of alternatives and the like and the JCS survey group -- as a kind of a military watchdog -- that we didn't need another. You see, by this time there was almost daily communication with Mann and Berle in the State Department; and I think probably my feeling was that it just was superfluous.

JBP Another question turns to personalities. Why you always sat still and let Amory get by with this claim that he didn't know what was going on, that the DDI didn't know what was going on.

RB I don't know how much Amory knew...I think he certainly surmised it.

JBP Amory sat in on at least one meeting with the Senate Appropriation subCommittee where Dulles went through and briefed them in detail on the damned operation.

RB Really? I didn't know that...ha ha.... Had I known that I would have....

JBP Well, I put that in here with the same category without that briefing that you put Kirkpatrick in. You know, with all of this going on, you would have had to be deaf, dumb and blind not to know. I was in the DDI, came out of the DDI and it always chagrined me that this claim was made about the lack of knowledge on the part of the DDI.

RB I think you could probably say that he wasn't officially knowledgeable.

JBP Did Jake Esterline and Hawkins ever threaten to resign from the operation, to your knowledge?

RB I have little doubt that both of them did at one time or another. I think that Jack Hawkins moment of greatest unhappiness was that I didn't put Beerli under him. I don't remember Jack ever saying that he flatly was going to resign, although it seems to me when I think back on it, that there may have been occasions when we were waiting around for one of the White House meetings, and Jack would say, well, ~~if they are going to take all the air cover away I am going~~ to ask to be relieved ~~and words to that effect.~~ I don't remember Jack ever coming to me and objecting so strongly to some decision of mine that he made noises of that sort. As I told you, the decision I have referred to, I think it was the one that he would identify as most unwelcome to him that I ever decided. On the other hand, if you have any records from the Taylor panel of inquiry or Jack's report to them, I am pretty sure that I saw these reports at the time...

JBP Forty-eight pages...no, wait a minute...he has a 7-page one on the Taylor Committee and then he wrote an after-action summary of 48 pages.

RB I think I saw the 7-page one. I don't remember what stress he put in that on the fact that he was not given command of the air arm.

JBP This is one of the factors, but this is not the basic problem that he raises in terms of the matter of lack of air support and the second strike gets the heavy stress.

RB I've given you the answer on Hawkins. Jake I guess got mad occasionally I don't remember the specific issues of which Jake got mad at me and threatened to resign.

JBP Well, I've got the note of a conversation that I had with Jake talking about Hunt's book -- this is the only time that I talked to Jake at all -- he faulted the Eisenhower administration for not pushing forward the small team concept even after the loss of the election in November and then at one point...

RB Do you know...what does he mean by that?

JBP Well, what he was talking about...O.K. you are not going to be President after the 20th of January but we have this force here that we have been training on, a small team, 25 two-men teams, or smaller group...we should go forward with it right now. This sort of thing that Berle was talking about in the case of some direct action between the [change of] administrations. What about authorization for Lynch and Robertson on D-day to go onto the beaches.

RB There was none.

JBP There was none?

RB No. There not only was none received from above my level, but that's something I never authorized; and I am quite certain that there wasn't an authorization.

JBP Nor after the collapse when they were with the US navy vessels up in the top of the Bay of Pigs and scrounging the shores for survivors?

RB Well, I don't think there was any specific authorization for that, although there could have been.

JBP About the Taylor Committee, I am still trying to lay hands on a copy of the four memoranda which I understand constitute the Taylor Committee Report, I haven't been able to lay...

RB I didn't know there were four. I know I saw a, what I believe to be the report of the Committee; and I am pretty sure that was the document drafted by Taylor himself.

JBP So that what you are saying is that there was one...

RB I don't happen to remember, Jack. There may have been some others -- some collateral documents. I don't happen to remember -- or what I may have seen may have been several memoranda bound together, or put together, or something of that kind. But it seemed to me that there was one set, and I remember a session, I think I saw this in writing. What I clearly remember was the meeting in the White House, upstairs in the President's sitting room, with the President, Gen. Taylor, Bobby Kennedy, Allen, and I think Pearre; and I was there, and I don't know if anybody else was there, but this is where Taylor made his oral presentation to the President, presumably for the panel. I thought that the report, by the way, was very fair and on the whole, mild, insofar as its findings about the operation was concerned. It was also concerned with the future and what should and shouldn't be done and, of course, there were all kinds of views about that. But I thought the views were very reasonable views in talking about the future, but I thought that as a commentary on what had been done right and what had been done wrong, it was a pretty fair document -- but it was a pallid document. In short, it was always curious to me that Taylor never picked up what I've identified to you in my mind as the worst single error in the military planning -- the inadequacy of the air arm..

JBP In terms of investigations, and so on. How much time did Kirkpatrick's people spend with you at the time that they were conducting...

RB Their investigation. I don't think very much with me personally. You of course, have seen his report, and I trust you also have seen the documents that Tracy Barnes...

JBP It all goes together.

RB I remember John McCone saying -- I remember once late in December saying -- I want you and Tracy to hurry up and get that finished. And he said, "I am saying only one thing, every copy of the IG report is going to have a copy of your rejoinder bound with it, so that anybody who sees this sees both."

JBP That is the way it is.

RB I don't remember very well Kirk's all too well.

JBP I have got one more rather lengthy reference here, it concerns a memo that you wrote.

JBP

RB Do you want me to read it? Why don't you take a look at this #78, there.

(continued on Tape 4.)

Brigade in training in Guatemala with inadequate facilities, with the pressure from Ydigoras, with the impatience of Brigade itself, that this was... simply could not be drawn out much longer. I am sure you will find memoranda and cable traffic saying this just cannot be extended very much longer. It is not an endurable state of affairs for any length of time. Then, there was the weather factor. My recollection is that we felt that the change in the weather, the monsoon or whatever it is, start in early May and some such time as mid-April, was coming very close to the latest date that was permissible with the weather. Now maybe that insistence on the weather as a factor was false, but I remember it clearly at the time.

JBP It was one that was constantly used, in terms of trying to precipitate some of the decisions, and that was a question that I wanted to ask, whether or not it was a genuine issue. I don't get the impression that it really was.

RB Maybe. My recollection is that I at least thought it was a genuine consideration. So I am trying to say that we didn't start soon enough because of the reasons I don't recollect. We had this fearful slippage at the early stage, but at the end, we at least felt that subject to perhaps a week or two latitude, we just didn't have more latitude. So on the whole, I do not think that the planning limits were set by the Agency excepting so far as, we didn't plan the beginning of it right. Now, I agree with your B(78b), I don't remember any objection to the fleet which was acquired, and I cannot answer your question, which seems to me to be an excellent one, as to why we didn't use more heavily armed vessels that could have been just about as deniable as what we did use. However, this goes back to your question of the two armed craft that were there. I don't know why they were taken out 25 miles and not used in an anti-aircraft role. That, I really would be most interested to know. On C(78c) you make your point... I don't particularly remember recruitment being slowed or recruits held, but I do remember very clearly that the training facility was believed to be overcrowded and that was contributing to a sense of urgency and the instability of the whole situation of the Brigade in its training phase. I think on D(78d)...

JBP I think you have already answered that.

RB On E(78e), I am not perfectly sure that I remember what I had in mind. I think even then I had in mind that this was a clinging to deniability-- much too long and at much too high a cost.

JBP Or, was this the question that we talked about initially, about your failure to scratch on the back of the envelope the time over target problem for...

RB That was very much on my mind I am quite certain. And finally... Well, I think that those are the identifiable things.

JBP One last question, if we may, since you are anxious to get away here. What about Dulles and Dulles being away at the time that...

RB That was very deliberately planned.

JBP Pardon?

RB That was deliberately planned.

JBP You say it was deliberately planned?

RB Yes. He had a meeting that he had planned to go to, and I think that he had planned that meeting very long in advance. I forgot where...down in Puerto Rico.

JBP What you are saying is, that it was planned in advance that he would be gone...it was not part of the Bay of Pigs operation.

RB Well, I am saying a couple of things, I'm saying first of all the plan to go to that meeting was of longstanding, and had nothing to do with the Bay of Pigs. Then, when it appeared that that would be the D-day, careful consideration was given as to whether he ought to cancel his meeting that was planned and the decision was that he should not. For cover reasons it would be better if he went right ahead, and he should not take an action that might pinpoint that date as a specially significant one.

JBP Then we are back on the denial business.

RB Yes.

This completes the oral interview with Richard M. Bissell, of the 17th of October 1975 in Farmington, Connecticut, in Mr. Bissell's office. Additional information on the Bay of Pigs was obtained from Mr. Bissell during discussions over lunch, and upon return to his office for a short period, but this material was not put on tape.