

The Night of the White Horse

By CDR Harold Feeney, USN (Ret)

Editor's Note: *This article first appeared in the Fall, 1988 edition of the NIP Quarterly under the title "The Bay of Pigs Remembered." Our NIP membership has more than tripled since that time, and we believe it appropriate to introduce to our hundreds of new members a story which is as gripping today as it was six years ago. It has been re-edited and updated with the permission of the author.*

It is hard to believe 34 years have gone by. Some of the memories are so vivid that they are more than real, like certain nightmares. And some of the events surrounding the Bay of Pigs invasion did indeed take on the aspect of nightmares even as they occurred one third of a century ago.

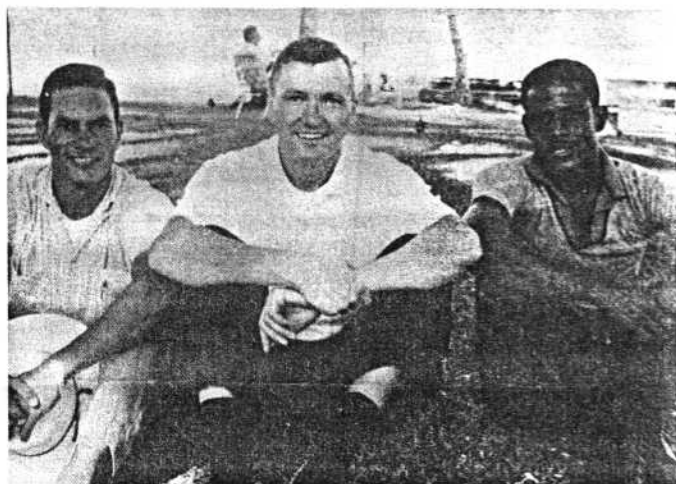
I was sent to Guantanamo Naval Base in the fall of 1960 to be Base Intelligence Officer, to cover the period six months before the invasion of Cuba until six months after the landing.

Before the break in diplomatic relations, most of the contacts with resistance movements in Cuba were made by CIA agents operating out of the Embassy and the Consulates. After the break it became very difficult to communicate, and urgent that CIA-trained Cuban exile secret agents be infiltrated to carry out the work—arranging air drops of weapons, recruiting other agents, gathering intelligence, organizing and training an underground force. The time was growing short.

From the exiles in the United States, the CIA had trained 80 of them as agents and agent/radio operators. These were very intelligent, patriotic young men who were willing to risk their lives to liberate their homeland from the communist yoke of Fidel Castro. Some of the infiltrated agents were captured and executed shortly after coming ashore, or died when fighting their way out of ambush. The coast was being watched closely by Castro's militia and G-2.

At that time, hundreds of native Cubans worked at the Guantanamo Base and commuted daily through the main gate, properly identifying themselves in each direction. Castro tolerated the arrangement because he wanted dollars, and it also gave him the chance to plant his own intelligence agents on the base. From time to time Cubans would flee into the Naval Base by jumping the fence. One of our jobs was to interrogate them to establish their identities and value for current intelligence.

Other than myself, my little team consisted of my assistant, ENS Jack H. Modesett, Jr., USNR, and occasional help from one or two ONI civilian agents who were stationed there to do background and security investigations. Special Agent Wallace, a former Navy Chief, worked with us on many clandestine matters. From among the Cuban civilian workers, we carefully recruited our own espionage ring, assigning targets, training them in photography, and



The author in a 1962 photo with two of the young infiltration agents, Rodolfo "Sea Fury" Hernandez (left) and Nestor "Tony" Izquierdo, taken after the agents escaped from Cuba.

debriefing for results. Both Modesett and I spoke Spanish with native fluency, which was essential.

I got wind of the difficulty the CIA was having in their efforts to infiltrate agents. We had developed a system of infiltrating and exfiltrating our own agents at night at a remote and isolated spot where the tropical forest came almost up to the fence that surrounded the 45-square-mile base. Sometimes if we were in a hurry, we did it in daylight hours, first riding the helicopter patrol to ascertain that all was clear. It took only a matter of seconds to clear the barbed wire and traverse the few yards to the edge of the forest.

It was so simple. Why not use the same system for the CIA-trained agents? I asked the commander of the Naval Base to give me TAD orders to Washington to present the plan. His job was to maintain the training function and protection of the base—not to be involved in matters that were extraneous to that mission. It was a disappointment. A contact in OP 921-H had passed the word to me on the "back channel" that the time and place of the invasion had been changed by the President. Instead of landing near Trinidad, it was to be at the Bay of Pigs.

Casilda, the port of Trinidad on the south central coast, had been selected because it gave easy access to the Escambray Mountains in case of need for dispersion of forces, as well as providing a convenient airfield. The JCS believed it was the best possible site, an excellent strategic location.

President Kennedy personally changed the landing site because he thought it was too near the populated area of Trinidad; that it would appear to be a large operation to the outside world and would surely be traced to its American

origins. The JCS was not at all comfortable with the Bay of Pigs site, but as long as the invasion force had "absolute control of the air" they gave it more than an even chance of success.

I asked the chief of staff for a few days leave and flew off to Washington. I explained to RADM Frankel at ONI the potential for infiltration. He arranged a briefing with CIA. The Agency was delighted at the prospect. We briefed ADM Burke, the CNO, and he was enthusiastic. He asked when I could get the first agent infiltrated and was told it depended on how soon I could get back to Guantanamo. ADM Burke said, "Take my plane."

And so it was that the first of a series of agents to be infiltrated came with me on CNO's own aircraft. His code name was "Pete." My own code name for all clandestine operations had always been "Quijote," and Modesett was "Pecos." Pete was also a radio operator.

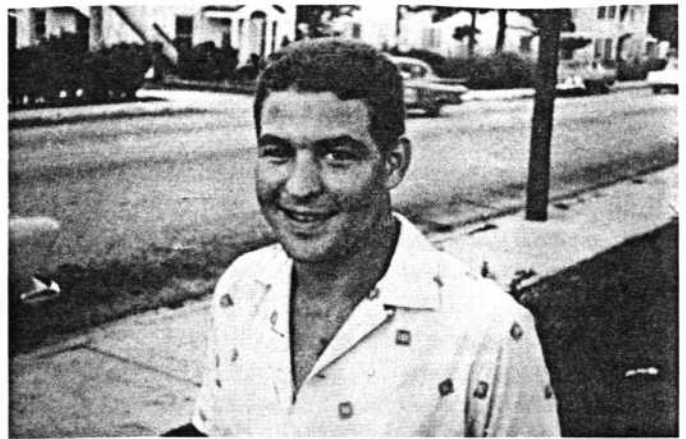
At this point, I had great trepidation regarding my career, knowing full well that, although I had not done anything illegal, I had acted on an idea that the base commander had been against in principle. I wondered what he would think when he received the message that CNO's plane was arriving with me and an exile agent on board. Much to my relief, the base commander did not hold it against me and my career survived and flourished.

There was established a direct communications link between my little group and the CIA operation. Weapons and supplies were funneled through me to resistance forces—as well as a small fortune in Cuban money. It was awesome to be handed a suitcase full of money and not even being asked for a receipt.

There was to be a diversionary landing in eastern Cuba by exile leader Niño Diaz, designed to draw Castro's troops away from the Bay of Pigs area. I was asked to find and recommend a good landing site. There was to be a "reception committee" to join the diversionary landing force. This reception would comprise a small resistance force trained and led by "Pete" and some other infiltrated agents. To this end, we supplied Pete and his fellow agents with weapons and explosives provided by the Agency, and they took off for the boondocks to prepare their force.

A few weeks later, while teaching how to use plastic explosives, a terrible accident occurred. A blasting cap slipped out of Pete's hand and fell on a whole box of them. The resulting explosion almost killed Pete and severely injured some of the others. Two of them lost the sight of one eye. Pete himself barely survived, with the only lasting effect that of deafness in one ear.

But at the time, the group was desperately in need of medical attention. They made their way back to the base fence line and let us know of their presence. We got them discreetly to the hospital, where startled doctors worked on them. Pete was not expected to live through the night. The surgeon thought at first that these were Castro's people. He asked me how he should treat Pete. I told him to treat him as if he were his own brother.



Former secret agent "Pete" after his escape from Cuba in 1962. He is now a nuclear engineer in the U.S.

The courage and dedication of these agents was manifest. For example, when the group had arrived at the fence after the explosion, Pete, although grievously wounded and half-conscious, refused to allow himself to be lifted across until his radios and "one-time pads" were safely on the other side.

A very strong relationship had developed between the CIA-trained agents and Modesett and me. When time was short and there was an urgent need for weapons and equipment in the boondocks, my little group and I carried ammunition and supplies on our own backs over the fence and into the Cuban forest. If this seems unorthodox or out of line, please consider the transcending importance of the coming event and the atmosphere of desperate urgency we lived under. The United States Government had undertaken to remove the communist regime of Fidel Castro. As far as we were concerned, we were "at war." It was beyond imagination that our government could undertake such an operation and fail.

A few months before the invasion we caught one of Castro's agents through surveillance of a suspected worker on the base, and asked the base commander to have him fired. He did so a bit reluctantly because the evidence was not tangible (overheard Spanish telephone conversations). However, he was very pleased the next day when he was handed incontrovertible proof from communication intercepts that the man was indeed a Castro agent. It gave us a great deal of credibility in his eyes from then on.

The invasion (on 17 April 1961) had been planned to follow on the heels of two air strikes designed to destroy all of Castro's military planes on the ground, this obviating the need for air cover. The first strike was successful. Only five warplanes were left. But the second air strike was called off by the President, who, nevertheless, let the invasion take place without air cover.

The nightmare had begun. Castro's five planes made round trips between San Antonio de Los Banos and the beachhead, destroying the invasion ships and decimating the exile brigade.

When it was obvious that the brigade would lose, ADM Burke begged the President to let him provide air cover from a US carrier standing by offshore. The President refused,

saying he did not want it to appear that the United States was involved. ADM Burke, in his frustration, reportedly cried out, "Goddamit, Mr. President, we *are* involved, and there is nothing we can do about it!"

Everything fell apart. Niño Diaz refused to land his diversionary force. Airdrops of weapons to waiting resistance groups were called off. The last message we received on Pete's radio said: "Imperative you understand that Niño (Diaz) refused to land. Failure (to) commence immediate action Oriente (Province) jeopardizes overall success invasion. It is now or never."

As it turned out, the diversionary landing would have been to no avail and would have cost the lives of those involved. All was lost at the beachhead at the Bay of Pigs.

Several Alabama Air National Guard pilots had been training the exile air arm for the CIA. When they realized the desperate situation at the Bay of Pigs they went against instructions and personally flew lumbering old B-26s, without tail guns, to the beachhead in an effort to give some assistance. They were shot down and killed by Castro's planes.

One of the pilots, Major Thomas Ray, survived the crash of his plane but was shot by Castro's soldiers. With a touch of the macabre—perhaps for future propaganda purposes—Castro had the American officer's body frozen and kept in a morgue in Havana. The CIA told Major Ray's wife that her husband was "working as a mercenary for a rich Cuban exile corporation and had been killed in the crash of his cargo plane." The family did not believe the cover story and Ray's daughter spent 18 years investigating his death. In 1978 the CIA sent a couple of agents to see the family and to present a posthumous medal for heroism for Major Ray's action, along with the true story of what he did. With the help of US Senator Sparkman and Congressman Buchanan, a demarche was made to the Cuban Government through the Czechoslovakian Embassy. Finally, in December 1979 the body of Major Ray was returned to his family in Alabama.

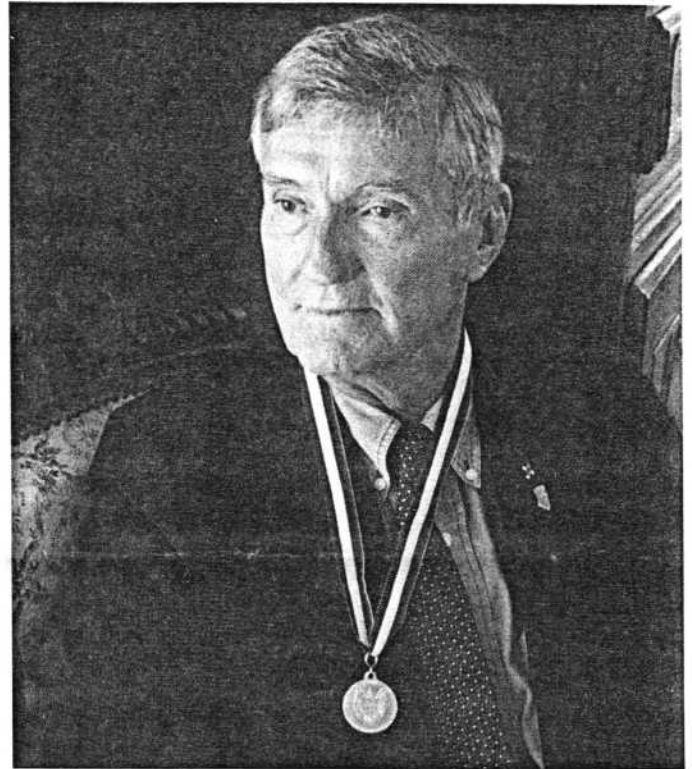
CIA Case Officer Grayson Lynch actually went ashore and fought beside the Cuban exile soldiers he had helped to train. The exile brigade had fought valiantly in what Admiral Burke called "the tragic story of a gallant failure."

After the fiasco, the next months were spent trying to exfiltrate agents who were "burnt" and no longer able to operate. We sent word to some of them to rendezvous with us at our isolated spot at the fence line at a certain hour. A number of them were saved in this way and were sent back to Florida on "black flights."

Of the 80 agents, 21 were either captured and executed, or killed trying to escape. I am glad to say that none of the agents passing through our hands in either direction met such a fate.

The exile Agents never blamed the CIA on the defeat of their efforts to liberate their country; some of them have continued the fight against communist incursions.

A former officer of the CIA and I were made honorary members of Exile Brigade 2506. We are invited to annual reunions of the surviving agents. In 1987 we were joined by



CDR Harold Feeney, USN (Ret), awarded the Medal of Valor by Cuban Assault Brigade 2506 in April 1994.

two of the brigade members who had just been released after many years in a Castro prison. They had not been executed because they successfully hid the fact that they were secret agents and had been arrested only on suspicion of anti-Communist behavior.

One of the agents recruited and trained by Pete was Alonso Gonzalez, code name "Curita." He was caught twice by Castro's G-2 and made daring escapes both times. We helped him get out of the country, but he had to leave his wife and child in Cuba. He brooded over this for a few years in Florida, and out of desperation he conceived a plan to get them out. He took flying lessons and practiced over a period of months. When he considered himself ready, he sent a message via the underground for his wife to be at a remote airstrip on a certain date and hour. It was a dangerous daylight attempt, flying the 90 miles low over the water to avoid radar.

He arrived at the airstrip, but the rescue was not to be. The underground had been penetrated by a Castro agent and Gonzalez had been betrayed. When he stepped down from the plane, troops rushed out of hiding and surrounded him. This time, there was no escape. They placed him before a wall for a firing squad. Just before the shots rang out that ended his life—just as had been done by so many martyrs in that communist land—"El Curita" cried out in a loud voice: *Viva Cristo Rey!* Long live Christ the King. To which many of us would add our fervent amen.

One of my memories, not without humor, generated the title of this story. One night I was with Pete and two other agents going cross-country to look for a likely place for an arms cache. It

was a black night. Seeing the dim outline of a country road ahead, I signaled to my companions to stay back while I went to reconnoiter. I was standing near the dirt road, when suddenly there came the sound of galloping horses, coming around a bend and headed right for me! I pulled back the flap of my M3 machine gun and prayed I wouldn't be seen.

The horses stopped right in front of me. The lead horse was pure white. It took a one-second eternity for me to see through the dimness that the horse had no rider! I gulped. It was a loose band of horses going through the countryside. They probably stopped because they smelled humans. I think it was at that second that I decided I wasn't cut out for this kind of work. My knees knocked too loud.

I recently received a Christmas card from Pete. It said simply: "Quijote, remember the Night of the White Horse?"

The author lives in Corpus Christi, Texas and continues to serve as an advisor to various US Agencies on US-Cuban affairs. On 17 April 1994 he was awarded the Medal of Valor by Assault Brigade 2506 for his support of the Cuban exiles in 1961.

Detailer Details

By LCDR Paul Becker, USN

The Holiday Season may be over, but we're sure the celebrating is continuing for the 54 junior officers (1630) selected for promotion to Lieutenant in Fiscal Year 95 (a 95% selection rate). Congratulations to all!

Regular Navy Augmentees

With a 65% selection rate, further congratulations to the following 15 Reserve intelligence officers (1635s) who have been selected for augmentation into the regular Navy as 1630s:

Rodney Brower	Steven Shepherd
Gina Giglio	Raul Rosales
Paul Harasty	Cole Evans
Kim Howard	Rich Stevenson
Michael Lynch	Jeff Uthe
Steve Trumbull	Cindy Rodriguez
Mike Lents	Robert Schmidt
David Hallstrom	

Unrestricted Line Transfers

And finally, congratulations to the following 15 officers who were selected for redesignation as 1630s during the October Lateral Transfer Board (previous designator in parentheses):

James Johnson (1110)	Alex Chalmers (1100)
Matthew Littleton (1110)	Amy Semeraro (1100)
Robin Dahlin (1110)	Constance Greene (1100)
Ron Draker (1110)	Christine McCarthy (1100)
Tim Tutt (1110)	Sims Wayt (1100)
Anthony Dyer (1110)	David Acton (1120)
Robert Cameron (1110)	Shawn Livingston (1637)
Terry Smith (1110)	

IS Issues

By ISCM(SW) John E. Daubenschmidt, USN

Hearty congratulations to all our new Petty Officers selected from the September advancement cycle. We selected 264 First, Second and Third Class Petty Officers. The advancement numbers are still excellent, especially when compared with Navy-wide percentages. **Keys to a successful exam:** *Start early*, study your bibliography (only 10% of exam questions come from the Rate Training Manuals), set aside time to study, and be aggressive—don't get complacent in your advancement efforts!

My travel schedule continues to be hectic, but very productive. During the last week of September I visited several of the major Intelligence Commands in Norfolk. I also met with the ISs on board the USS Eisenhower (CVN-69), the USS Peleliu (LHA-5) and the USS Tarawa (LHA-1) and am extremely impressed with the "Intel Professionals" we have in our afloat Intelligence Centers.

The 2nd annual Intelligence Chiefs Advisory Group (ICAG) meeting was held in San Diego 20-26 October, and many important issues concerning the IS community were discussed. The most significant issue was the question of "pooling" NEC-3905 ISs (independent duty aboard small combatants). Although the concept has many merits, the cost to the IS community is too great. It isn't really about the gathering of assets; it stems from the lack of training and support to personnel at jobs where only one or two people are assigned. The recommendation to the Naval Intelligence Training Council (NITC) was to increase the number of training days at the IS "C" School and improve training and support to the IS once he/she is deployed.

A second recommendation was to expand our "Outstanding IS of the Year" program, established several years ago. The ICAG resolved that we needed to better recognize our more junior ISs, and recommended that we expand the program to select two junior (E-1 through E-4) and two senior (E-5/E-6) Petty Officers. The DNI approved the proposal and selectees will be announced late next month.

I have recently completed visits to all major Intel Commands in Hawaii, Korea and Japan, and found many similar concerns at every location, but they can be grouped into two basic areas: Support while deployed or stationed at a "remote" location, and en route professional training. More on the subject in the next *Quarterly*.

In closing, I would like to welcome the new IS Detailer, Senior Chief Jon D. Kettl, whose two previous tours were with COMSUBLANT and on board the USS Ticonderoga (CG-47). I don't envy him—he has one of the most difficult jobs the Navy can offer. As for me, I have a new office in the Pentagon. I can be reached via my ONI (NMIC) address and phone number, or at : CNO(N2), 2000 Navy Drive (Rm 5C564), Washington, DC 20350; Tel: (703) 697-4019.