

VI. BRIGADE 2506—MANUEL ARTIME—MOVIMIENTO DE RECUPERACION REVOLUCIONARIA (MRR)

(232) No other anti-Castro Cuban group more naturally attracted the initial attention of the committee than Brigade 2506, the organization formed specifically for the Bay of Pigs invasion and the one that experienced the most dramatic relationship with the Kennedy administration in terms of its hopes and failures.

(233) Following their release from Castro's prisons in December of 1962, the members of the brigade harbored deep-seated emotional conflicts in their attitude toward the government. An observer who watched them arrive in Miami noted:

They were earnest, bewildered, still in a state of shock at their sudden liberation, still nursing a bitter sense of betrayal at the manner in which they were sent ashore and abandoned, still torn between trust and cynicism, still in awe at the power of an American Government that could, at will it seemed, pluck them out of the darkest dungeons in Havana and on the Isle of Pines, and deposit them back in Florida with their families by Christmas Eve. (1).

(234) In the perspective of an investigation of the Kennedy assassination, the members of Brigade 2506 had to be considered of primary interest if only in terms of motivations and means. As one member, who later became involved in anti-Castro terrorist activity, explained: "We learned from them. We use the tactics that we learned from the CIA * because we were trained to do everything. We were trained to set off a bomb, we were trained to kill." (2)

(235) The formation of what was to become Brigade 2506 can be traced to March 1960 when President Dwight Eisenhower authorized the CIA to organize, train, and equip Cuban refugees for the purpose of eventually overthrowing Castro. (3) To head the group, a young physician was chosen who had organized the Movimiento de Recuperación Revolucionaria (MRR), the first anti-Castro action group inside Cuba. (4) His name was Manuel Artime; he had fled Cuba the previous December. (5) Castro had appointed him a member of the National Agrarian Reform Institute but when, in October 1959, he heard Castro outline a plan to communize Cuba, Artime publicly resigned his position and denounced Castro. (6)

(236) The group that eventually grew into Brigade 2506 originally consisted of only 28 men. (7) The nucleus was 10 former Cuban military officers whom Artime had recruited. (8) He told them that he had been told by a group of Americans who claimed to have no association with the U.S. Government that they would receive a huge amount of arms, equipment, and funds. (9) The Americans tried to give Artime and

*In fact, U.S. Army Special Forces, not the CIA, trained the brigade.

his men the impression that an anonymous Cuban millionaire was paying the bills, but the Cubans eventually began referring to their benefactor as "Uncle Sam." (10)

(237) At secret camps in Florida, in Panama, and eventually in Guatemala, the U.S. Government trained the core of future brigade leaders in guerrilla warfare. (11) By September 1960, this initial cadre was part of a group of 160 men undergoing vigorous military conditioning in the treacherously dense mountain jungles of the Sierra Madre in Guatemala. (12) That month, one of the men, Carlos (Carlyle) Rodriguez Santana, was killed in training. (13) In his honor, the members of the unit decided they would name the brigade after his serial designation, 2506. (14)

(238) Although Manuel Artime, through his MRR organization transplanted in Miami, was the principal recruiting apparatus for brigade personnel, chosen as military leader of the brigade was Jose ("Pepe") Perez San Roman, a graduate of Cuba's military academy who had also undergone U.S. Army officer training at Fort Benning, Ga. (15) He had been freed by Castro from a Batista prison, then later reimprisoned by Castro before escaping from Cuba. (16)

(239) Nevertheless, it was Artime who remained the key figure in the U.S. Government's relationship with the activist exiles and the brigade. When, as the Cuban exile population in Miami grew and the political squabbling among anti-Castro factions spread to Guatemala and sparked a camp mutiny that almost stopped the training, it was Artime the CIA called upon to help resolve the problem. (17) Artime had been made a director of the Frente Revolucionario Democratico (FRD), (18) a political and propaganda organization involving several anti-Castro groups formed in May 1960. (19) The brigade was to be its military arm. (20) But the political fighting among the groups eventually led to its dissolution and creation of a broader-based organization, the Cuban Revolutionary Council (CRC), before the Bay of Pigs invasion. (21) Artime also was made a director of that group. (22)

(240) The Bay of Pigs invasion took place in April 1961. (23) More than 1,200 brigade members were taken prisoner by Castro. (24) Before they were released in December 1962, in an exchange for \$53 million in medical supplies, (25) the members of the brigade suffered not only the humiliation of defeat and capture by Castro, they also were subject to the agony of false hope when, within a few months of their imprisonment, they saw Castro's offer to exchange them for 500 tractors become inextricably bogged in the muck of partisan U.S. politics. As one historian noted:

The prisoners suffered more from domestic politics than they did at the hands of Castro. * * * Had the political climate in the United States been less inflammatory, it is not at all unlikely that Brigade 2506 could have been released in June of 1961 for \$28 million in tractors, cash, and credits. Instead of freedom through tractors, however, the men were doomed to the degradation of a year and a half longer in prison. (26)

(241) The final formation of Brigade 2506 took place at the Orange Bowl Stadium in Miami on December 29, 1962. President Kennedy

was there to welcome back the surviving members who had spent almost 20 months in Castro's prisons.(27) The crowd of 40,000 friends, families, and relatives cheered in tearful joy as brigade chief Pepe San Roman presented Kennedy with the brigade flag, which had flown over the Bay of Pigs beach for 3 days.(28) The President accepted the flag and declared: "I can assure you that this flag will be returned to this brigade in a free Havana." Mrs. Kennedy spoke in Spanish and called the brigade members "the bravest men in the world."(29) It was a dramatic and emotional scene, but it may have been misleading. Although the event reflected publicly a concordant rapport between the President and the brigade, beneath the surface there ran a vein of bitter resentment among those who felt the event was a display of political hypocrisy. E. Howard Hunt, once assigned liaison duties with the brigade, claimed later that the brigade feeling against Kennedy was so great that the presentation of the flag nearly did not take place.(30)

(242) Nevertheless, it is difficult to finalize an assessment of the brigade's collective attitude toward the U.S. Government and the Kennedy administration following the Orange Bowl event. Kennedy's resolution to the Cuban missile crisis, in which he promised Castro that raids against Cuba from the U.S. mainland would be halted, was considered an act of betrayal to their cause by many of the exiles in the anti-Castro communities. Yet most of the members of the brigade seemed to maintain a basic confidence in the U.S. Government's resolve to topple the Castro regime, and, in fact, nearly half of them enlisted in the U.S. Armed Forces through a special arrangement made by President Kennedy himself.(31)

(243) Although Brigade 2506 officially ceased to exist after December 1962,(32) Manuel Artime, who had become known as the CIA's "golden boy,"(33) was soon scouting around Latin America for sites on which to establish guerrilla training camps. By October 1963, he had established four bases, two in Costa Rica and two in Nicaragua.(34) Artime's 300-man force consisted mainly of veterans of the brigade.(35) Artime would later admit that his resources included two large ships, eight small vessels, two speed boats, three planes, and more than 200 tons of weapons and armaments and about \$250,000 in electronic equipment.(36) During the year of his operation, Artime was able to conduct four major operations, three of which failed: the mistaken shelling of a Spanish cargo ship (which caused an international uproar); an infiltration mission in which all the participants were captured; an unsuccessful assassination attempt on Castro;(37) and finally, a six-man infiltration mission that did succeed.(38)

(244) Although Artime received U.S. Government support, there remained the question of whether President Kennedy was knowledgeable of or approved Artime's anti-Castro operations after the Cuban missile crisis. Following the assassination of both John F. Kennedy and Robert F. Kennedy, Artime said publicly that both the President and his brother were responsible for his establishing the Latin American bases.(39) He said that after his return from prison in Cuba, he met President Kennedy in West Palm Beach, Fla., and that Kennedy referred him to his brother.(40) Artime said he met Robert Kennedy

in Washington and that the then Attorney General promised him military aid if he, Artime, could get the bases. (41)

(245) Artime claimed that his anti-Castro operations from the bases ceased "when Bobby Kennedy separated from the Johnson administration." (42) Nevertheless, in December 1964, the Costa Rican police ordered the camps shut down when it uncovered a \$50,000 contraband whisky operation involving a plane from Artime's group. The camps in Nicaragua were also closed, although Artime kept close personal ties to that country by becoming a beef broker for Nicaraguan President Gen. Anastasio Somoza, the country's largest beef producer. (43)

(246) When Artime was first contacted by the committee, he stated that he had had direct contact with both President Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and, through them, was given full support by the CIA for his anti-Castro operations. He said he felt the death of President Kennedy marked the end of the U.S. Government's attempts to liberate Cuba. (44) He agreed to be interviewed by the committee (45) but, before that was possible, he died of cancer at the age of 45 after a brief illness. (46)

Submitted by:

GAETON J. FONZI,
Investigator.
ELIZABETH J. PALMER,
Researcher.

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