

**MEMORANDUM ON CASTRO'S STATEMENTS
AND NOTES ON CUBAN TRIP, April 5-9, 1963**

TO: The Attorney General

FROM: John E. Nolan, Jr.

Following is a summary of statements made by Castro to me or in my presence together with some general notes and observations about the trip. This summary does not include any of the matters discussed by Donovan and Castro during their long early-morning conference on Sunday, April 7, when I was not present. That conference is reported on a tape made by Donovan and in a report to Mr. McCone.

Guerilla Warfare:

Castro is a student and staunch advocate of guerilla warfare. He said that they knew little or nothing about it when the revolution started; they improvised and experimented during their time in the mountains. He said that the essence of successful guerilla operations is a strong political orientation and that this spirit - identity with a dynamic political movement - is much more important than military technique and equipment. He cited CIA emphasis on

technique rather than political orientation as a serious mistake. He said they had obtained CIA manuals, considered them excellent and were using them in their own training.

Regular Military Forces:

He appeared to have a very real scorn for regular military forces and what he refers to as the "military mind." He said that he had a strong faith in the outcome of the revolution from the time he was sure that the government would continue to use only regular military forces against him. He said that their methods and moves were usually predictable and it was characteristic of them that if a plan had to be abandoned, they were totally lost. He made frequent references to "guerilla mentality" which he considered essential to success in fighting in Cuba and the "regular military mentality" which he considers to be fatal.

Cuban Baseball:

All amateur, it's organized so that the winning team from each league and the all-star team from that league compete for the right to go on to the next level of competition. There is a team for each province, named in most instances for the most important crop or product produced there, i.e., the Havana Province team is called

"Industriales." During 1958, last year of the Batista government, total attendance at ball games had dwindled to a few thousand. There was a sharp increase last year and total attendance this year during a 2-month season was about 50% over the total attendance last year during a 3-month season.

Castro is very enthusiastic about sports. On Saturday he played a 9-inning baseball game in the stadium himself and pitched the first 4 innings. The players on both sides were pick-up teams. He played in his dungaree uniform. There was no public attendance. He views the increased attendance at sports events as an indication that the people are happy and are enjoying themselves. On the Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights while we were in Havana the Industriales and the Orientales engaged in a 3-game playoff for the All-Cuba championship. Castro was a strong rooter for the Orientales representing his home province. The Industriales won the play-off after dropping the first game. We watched the first and second games on Friday and Saturday nights.

Civilian Militia Forces:

He said that identification of the individual citizen with the army was the most important element in maintaining an effective

military force. For years in Cuba the army had been viewed as being the enemy of the people. The army took what it needed or wanted from citizens and never paid. He feels that the present Cuban militia is merely an extension of the Cuban people into the military sphere and that it has the peoples' support.

The Revolution, 1956-58:

He said that before starting the revolution he had been told that he might win with the army or without the army but that he could not win against the army. He placed the total strength of Batista's army at 50,000.

He thought in the beginning that the revolution could be developed in the cities, principally Santiago de Cuba and Havana. He abandoned this approach after the Moncado Barracks assault in 1953 when he said he realized that Batista's large army could concentrate its forces and use its strength most effectively in the cities where communications and transportation were at its disposal. In the provinces and particularly in the mountains this could not be done. It was at that point that he took his revolution to the countryside and to the people.

He told of a careful campaign to win the trust and allegiance of the people. His men paid for all of the livestock or food that

they took, they observed a rigid code of courteous treatment of the people and of not using force against them. They were aided, of course, in this campaign by the brutality of Batista's forces which increased as the war of attrition progressed and Batista's grip became more and more insecure.

At the same time they competed for the support of the people, they competed for the support of Batista's army itself. They released all regular army soldiers that they captured after taking their weapons, ammunition and anything that would be of value to their forces. After such capture, Batista's soldiers would be transferred out of Oriente Province to units of the army stationed elsewhere. In the latter months of the war when fighting opened up on other fronts many of the men who had surrendered the first time in Oriente Province readily surrendered a second or even a third time because they felt confident of the same kind of treatment.

He said there were no large scale defections from Batista's forces until the final weeks of the war when, in some instances, entire companies with all officers and equipment surrendered.

As his forces developed the techniques of the mountain guerilla warfare, they also developed leaders. From his original

band of a few that went into the Sierra Maestra after the landing in Oriente Province, he said that Che Gueverra and Camillo Cienfuegos developed to the point where each was given a troop of men and sent off from the main group to open up additional sectors of the overall effort.

In response to a question from Donovan, Castro talked about the role of the American, Morgan, in the revolution and in the government after. He referred to Morgan as the member of a group headed by another individual (now one of the leaders of Alpha 66). This group operated independently in one of the provinces (I believe Camaguey) toward the end of the war and functioned principally as a holding operation. They kept a large force of government troops occupied there without engaging in any real fighting.

When the war was over, this group - according to Castro - had an eagerness in seeking material rewards and military rank not matched by their records in combat. He thought that this group did not have the proper spirit of the revolution. He said he gave Morgan a job in the government - in charge of fish hatcheries, I believe - and then it was found that Morgan was involved in the smuggling of arms to a counterrevolutionary group headed by his old commander. Castro said he would like to have done something for Morgan, but the charge

was just too serious. Morgan was shot.

When asked about Herbert Mathews and the effect of his first stories written in 1957, Castro tended to minimize Mathews' influence. He said that the articles had no effect within Cuba because they were not seen there, that his group had been in the mountains for many months when the Mathews articles first appeared and that the group remained at about the same strength for long after the articles had appeared. He said his strength only began to grow after dissatisfaction with the Batista regime became widespread, and he had gained the confidence of the "peasants" in the provinces.

The Cuban Government:

Castro said that the first year of the new government (1959) was hectic and cited loss of almost the entire managerial class of Cuba as the most serious single problem. He said the Government tried many things on an experimental basis and made many mistakes.

Not among these, however, was the program to wipe out illiteracy within one year. This he described in glowing terms, citing examples of people learning to read and write at the age of 70, etc.

The dominant single theme in Castro's conversations, the one to which he returns again and again, is pointing out things that his government has done for "the people." These references are always highlighted by comparisons with the situation under Batista. They are always presented in terms of their low cost to the people. In this way we were shown apartments on the road to Veradero (15,000 apartments); vacation houses for workers, vacation resorts, etc. Castro explained the government's program for planting millions of trees throughout Cuba (no reforestation program previously particularly at the beaches, "so the people can have shade as well as sun." In the restaurant at a workers' resort he explained the menu to us in some detail, paying particular attention to the price of each item.

He said that in 1959 there had been thousands of unemployed and a serious unemployment problem. But under the impetus of the revolution, he said, new projects had begun and now he said there was a labor shortage. He referred to people now moving from job to job as a current problem and said he thought it would have to be corrected by a law.

Castro explained that there had been a drought in Cuba for the past two years and that primarily for this reason the production of sugar cane was off significantly. He said that the blow to their

economy had been softened, however, by the relatively high price of sugar over that period, and that they would have a large crop this year.

Discussing the agriculture problem generally, he said that with a good deal of land in a crop like sugar there could be a profit in farming. But he said it was difficult for a small farmer to make a living in other crops, and he sought to demonstrate the difference as we drove along the road through Matanzas Province by pointing out the same crop under the care of an individual farmer on a small plot and as raised on a collective farm. He said that the collectives were designed to solve the problem of the small farmer and that they had been fairly successful.

He said there is a milk shortage in Cuba today. For that reason they have passed a law prohibiting the killing of cows.

It is apparent that the Cubans have discovered the utility of the cement block. With it they have constructed several types of a basic small house for fishermen and farmers. Without the necessity of central heating, these can be put up quickly and inexpensively. There are, at any rate, a lot of them around. Painted in bright colors they provide an attractive replacement for the old thatched roof huts that many in Cuba still live in. Castro said that

after the government had put some of these cement block houses up the people got the idea that they wanted to put them up themselves. Then he said that the government was directing its attention to finding an adequate source of supply of cement blocks at a cheap price. He seemed to take exceptional pride in this self-construction by the "peasants" on the land they farmed.

Castro also is keenly interested in submarine fishing and underwater life. He had been told stories of the "lady fish" supposedly weighing 10,000 pounds and to be found off the South coast of Cuba, and pursuit of this fish is a topic that he discusses with gusto.

He expressed considerable interest in the system of closed circuit television with which the New York public school system is now experimenting. He also seemed interested in the possibility of Cuba having an exhibit at the New York Worlds Fair in 1964.

Generally speaking, Castro appears to have an interest in anything that might contribute to the raising of living standards. He seems preoccupied with this subject.

Castro's Description of the Invasion:

On Monday Morning, we arose at 5:30 and after breakfast left

-11-

Varadero for the long drive across Cuba through Matanzas Province to the Bay of Pigs on the south shore. As we approached the salt marshes just north of the Bay of Pigs, Castro began his description of the battle. This description was to continue until we had arrived at the water and boarded the boat and then it was resumed after we finished fishing and were driven to Playa Giron to visit the fishing school there.

It may be well to mention first that the Bay of Pigs is a large body of water, possibly 20 miles across and perhaps 10 miles deep. At its northern end is Playa Larga, now a resort for workers and their families, and on its eastern side is Playa Giron, where the principal landing and most of the fighting took place. The salt marshes extend all around the bay to a depth of 5 miles or so, and they are said to be totally impassable except for one main road running through and a secondary road from the eastern side of the Bay. The salt marsh points up the strategic significance of the site because control of the extreme ends of the road means control of the entire road and all the territory from the beach to firm ground at the northern end of the marshes.

To demonstrate the impassibility of salt marsh, Castro stopped our cars and walked several paces into the marsh from the side of the road. The ground was spongy and water coxed up as his boots sunk down into it. Some of his guards exhibited concern, and he returned to the road before quicksand of the marshes could furnish a weird twist to what we refer to as "the Cuban problem."

He said that his advance information of the invasion was obtained in detail from the American press. Through the press he was aware of the formation and training of the invasion force. The only questions were the date and whether there would be a single thrust invasion of many landing parties at different points along the coasts of Cuba.

He said that it was clear to him well in advance of the invasion that it would have to be a single landing. Because the Brigade was led by regular military officers and trained in regular military methods he felt certain that it could not mount the guerilla-type offensive that would have to follow the many simultaneous landings of small forces. If there was to be only one landing, he was pretty sure that it would be at the Bay of Pigs, and he considered in advance problems of moving his men and equipment to that site.

He said he also realized well in advance of the invasion that there would be an attempt to knock out his available aircraft. For

-13-

this reason he had ordered them dispersed and camouflaged, and he noted that they could afford to lose a few anyhow because they had more planes than pilots. He cited a critical shortage of artillery-trained personnel as another weakness which he was aware of in advance. To meet this problem he doubled up on artillery classes (taught by Czech technicians) and ordered that the Cuban students taught in the morning would teach other Cuban students in the afternoon of the same day.

When the invasion came he said that they had an adequate number of trained artillerymen. "Artillery," as he used the term, includes antiaircraft. He said they had more than 54 antiaircraft guns, mostly 20 mm, and they were able to move them all to the Bay of Pigs area shortly after the invasion started.

It was for this reason that he said that aircover for the Brigade would not have been decisive: his antiaircraft was so strong that it would have been able to knock out even much stronger air support for the invasion.

He told of having built the roads by packing hard dirt and rocks on the rock base under the salt marsh. He pointed out the place where the paratroops had landed, the control point where the main road emerged from the salt marsh and joined firm ground.

He said that he had been in Havana, asleep, when he was notified that the invasion had actually begun. Arising, he hurried to the Bay of Pigs. Shortly after he arrived, he received a message that this was only a feint and that another landing was being made simultaneously at Pinar Del Rio. He hurried there only to find that this was a false report. It was necessary for him to return to the Bay of Pigs where the battle raged.

He noted the difference between deployment of air by both sides. His airplanes were directed to skip the men on the beach and proceed directly to an attack on the supporting ships. The Brigade's air proceeded directly to attack Cuban troops arriving to fight the paratroopers at the road head.

Castro said he viewed the immediate establishment of a provisional government as the objective of the invasion. He said they did not come prepared to capture very much ground, or to receive the support of a simultaneous uprising of the people. He felt that he had to prevent the landing of the provisional government at the beach at all costs, and for that reason he considered time of the very essence and considered it necessary to mount wave after wave in attacks against the invaders.

-15-

He explained that they had a system of communications by runner rather than by radio and cited several examples of faulty communications, wrong words and messages not received among his troops. In some instances this had caused his troops to fire on their own men and chaos had resulted.

When asked about casualties sustained by the defenders, he seemed to stall and when pressed finally came up with an estimate of 150-180 dead. He was vague about the total wounded, and had no additional comment despite the surprise we expressed at this total -far lower than any heard of previously.

Toward the end of the battle he said that he passed one group of 20-25 of the Brigade, huddled together, still retaining their weapons but thoroughly demoralized. He said that he had no fear of them because they were so demoralized and he attributed that condition to their training as a regular military force and their consequent total loss of all initiative when the plan they were carrying out had gone awry.

The distances involved in the battle were far greater than I had known before (Playa Giron, for example, is more than 20 kilometers from Playa Larga). After we returned from a day on the boats out on the Bay, Castro took us over to Playa Giron, present site of a school for boys learning to be fishermen. It was late

-16-

afternoon when we arrived. The cars stopped close to a ball field where a large number of boys were playing and Castro proceeded to the field and hit a few in batting practice. The distance from the cars to the playing field was perhaps 200 yards. His crowd of young admirers built up as we walked along and there were literally hundreds of young boys around him by the time he had taken a stance at the plate. Their appreciation continued at a high voice level despite his somewhat dismal performance as a hitter. We then trooped back to the cars and drive off.

GENERAL CONVERSATION RETURNING TO HAVANA:

From the fishing school we began our return trip to Havana with the first stop at Treasure Lake, a workers' resort constructed from the salt marshes. We left the cars at the resort entrance adjacent to the highway and boarded speed boats for the run of a mile or so through the curving channels cut out of the marsh. Treasure Lake itself is so named because of the large quantities of gold and silver fish found there. The resort has been built on wooden pilings which hold it above the water. Cottages, the pavilions, etc. are connected by arching wooden walkways and by the channels. Everything is wood, there are no telephones; architecture is based on that of the early Indians, first people in Cuba. We were told the cottages rented for \$8-12 per day each, including meals.

From Treasure Lake we went to a public restaurant for dinner and from there began the 2 1/2 hour return trip to Havana. It was during this trip that Donovan and Castro engaged in a long conversation covering a variety of general subjects.

The conversation began with Donovan's observation that Castro could well be assassinated during his mingling with the people and frequent public exposure. Castro replied that he felt that the crowds themselves furnished a large measure of protection because he felt that

most of the people were strongly for him and thus served to insulate him from any would-be assassin. Beyond that, however, he said that he learned a lot from talking with the people and that it was actually necessary for him to operate effectively. He said that this type of exposure serves to increase the people's respect for him and the popularity of his government. He added that he did not feel the risk was actually too great; he felt that there was little or no feeling directed against him personally as distinguished from his government; in five years there had been no serious problem.

Castro said he thought that the Cuban invasion was the result of bad advice given to President Kennedy by those around him.

Donovan assured him that many in the U. S. felt that Castro was badly advised from time to time also, but that we would not go into that.

Castro said that in Cuba in 1960 they had regarded the new administration in Washington hopefully, that they had hoped it would adopt a "more statesmanlike" approach to Cuba. Then they had seen that there was not to be improvement. We made no comment.

Castro said, "This man McNamara, what is his background? Is he a military man?" Donovan answered that McNamara's military service had been relatively minor during World War II, that before becoming Secretary of Defense he had been president of one of our largest corporations. They asked which one. Castro said he had

asked about McNamara because McNamara sounded to him like a military man, he used military terms correctly like he was accustomed to them and really understood them. Donovan said he was sure that Secretary McNamara would have received the suggestions of his military advisors before making a public address.

Castro then asked if it was not strange that we should have our military department in the hands of a man not experienced in the military. He was then advised of the strong tradition of civilian control in this country and the warning in Eisenhower's farewell address was mentioned. Castro said it seemed to him that McNamara was very efficient, and that our government, for all its size, was able to move very quickly. He said he was very impressed with this and implied that failure to act quickly was one of the problems he faced in Cuba.

There was some talk of the high value placed by Americans on independence and freedom of expression. Castro asked Donovan if he thought there was any other people in the world as independent as the Americans, and Donovan replied that he didn't think there was. Castro then said that he regarded Donovan as the prototype of the present day successful American, citing the fact that he was able to operate independently outside the guidelines of established procedures. He said it seemed to him that Donovan was able to

think originally on a pragmatic basis and make the most of situations as they developed and it seemed to him (Castro) that these were American traits.

There followed a discussion of freedom of the press where Castro acknowledged that the government controlled "about 5% of the news in Cuba. He said that the remainder was free and outside of government control and complained that he had a lot of difficulty with the press printing things that the government didn't want them to or things that might be contrary to the government interest.

There was a discussion of the Havana English language radio broadcasts (pure propaganda of the driest and most obvious sort). Castro acknowledged that this could well be and said he had not been satisfied with these broadcasts.

As we reached the outskirts of Havana the conversation turned to details of the release of the skindivers the following day and the other Americans on the 22nd. Castro came into the house to go over some of the documentary evidence related to the skindivers. He left after a half-hour or so and that was the last we saw him.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Castro's Health:

It would seem to be good. Vallejo, his personal physician, said that he had some gastric difficulty a few months ago which had cleared up. Vallejo thought this was a result of the irregular life he leads, rushed meals, skipped meals, tension, etc. Castro himself said that he now sleeps 6 hours a night and leads a much more regular existence than during the first year of the government. He appears fit and seemed to be in good shape after submarine fishing for something over two hours which he said was the equivalent of swimming 2-3 miles. The day we were with him he had about 4 hours sleep but then took a long nap after lunch. That night in the car he expressed satisfaction that he was not tired after such an active day. He has never seemed the least bit tired when we have been with him. He eats lightly (usually finishing up with a dish of sour milk) and drinks a good deal of orange juice, rarely drinks anything alcoholic (2 scotch and sodas Saturday night) and smokes cigars somewhat absent-mindedly.

Castro's Guard:

His personal security seems adequate and efficient. There were 8-12 men traveling with him wherever we went. We traveled in his car. There were two other cars that rotated the lead and tail positions. The cars are all late-50's model Oldsmobiles.

Among the guards is one who prepares all Castro's meals and this man always served him, even in the public restaurant. When we were fishing these guards manned patrol craft which accompanied us and they had separate speed boats for the trip through the channels out to Treasure Lake. The guards are all armed with sidearms at the minimum and the cars are stocked with sten guns, machine guns, automatic rifles and ammunition. They drive well but very fast. The tail car blocks so that no other car can get into the convoy. They automatically set up security around whatever building Castro is in.

Credibility:

Castro talks with conviction and with flashes of apparent candor. Throughout the prisoner exchange negotiations he has been both reasonable and reliable and has not been difficult to deal with. It is obvious, however, that some of his statements do not square with reality (only 5% of news controlled) and others seem very questionable (success of the anti-illiteracy campaign, low casualties at the Bay of Pigs, etc.). I have tried to set out what he said as accurately as I can recall it, and a close review of this may turn up other items that give a better measure of his credibility.

Limits of Our Observations:

We were in Cuba this time for a period of five days. Our contact with Castro was relatively close over that entire period; we were with him a good deal and saw him in a variety of circumstances and different surroundings. Apart from the contact with him, however, we talked with only two other Cubans (Vallejo and Mendes who was in charge of the diplomatic guest houses). We had no access to any of the Cuban people. It is probably also true that our presence in Havana was concealed from most of the Cuban people. Castro never appeared in public in Havana with us. He met us at Varadero and the trip to the Bay of Pigs began from there and ended in Havana after dark.

General Observations:

We were driven back and forth through Havana innumerable times and we covered 600-700 miles through cities, villages and countryside during Sunday and Monday. During the trip on Monday we met a lot of people with Castro who talks to everybody. My observations on the basis of this experience were the following:

- 1) The country is saturated with propoganda, all of it government, most of it communistic or militant. Newspapers, radio, billboards, buildings, are devoted in large measure to propoganda. There is little or no advertising.

- 2) The people seem active and spirited. There were just under 30,000 enthusiastic rooters at the baseball games we attended, people thronged the streets on Saturday night, the churches were filled on Palm Sunday, etc.
- 3) Castro is a skilled politician. He seems constantly in front of the people or on exhibition in one way or another, in public or in the press. People yell "Fidel!" when he passes and he waves back. This may not mean much. On the other hand, during three trips to Cuba I have not seen or heard of any dissatisfaction with him personally.
- 4) Material welfare of the people is difficult to judge. They seem reasonably well fed and dressed. Stores, however, are short of many consumer items, particularly in clothes. Spare parts are needed for everything.