TOM PUTNAM: Good afternoon, everyone. We're not quite ready to start, but I also didn't have a chance to practice something I'm going to do in my introduction. And so I'm going to practice it now and all of you can watch. It's part of a website that we have called JFK50.org. And why don't we watch this one? I just want to be sure it's working before we start our program.

Now we must be ready for a new danger, the atomic bomb.

Today, every inhabitant of this planet must contemplate the day when this planet may no longer be habitable.

Weapons of war must be abolished before they abolish us.

It is therefore our intention to challenge the Soviet Union, not to an arms race, but to a peace race.

I take pride in the words *Ich bin ein Berliner!*

Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall.

We must clearly demonstrate our good will to our right compatriots.

Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures. And however undramatic the pursuit of peace, that pursuit must go on.

TOM PUTNAM: Great, it worked. So, again, I'm going to mention this in my introduction, but it's a new website that you can go to when you go home. It's www.JFK50.org. And there are a variety of themes: public service, science and innovation, Civil Rights, domestic affairs, the arts, foreign policy and diplomacy, and the environment. That's one aspect of the website.

I'm not going to do all of this in my introduction, so I'll show all of you now. There's this fascinating Legacy Gallery where you can hear people like Stephen Colbert -- I won't play these others so you can keep the lights up -- and listen to people whose lives have
been affected by President Kennedy. There's a variety, again, based on these themes that you see over here.

Then, a portion of the site that I'm going to talk about in my introduction is a section that we call History Now. And it hits all of the major milestones and watershed events of the Kennedy Presidency, and the one that I'm going to highlight in my introduction is the Bay of Pigs. So I'm not going to do that now, I'm going to do that as part of my introduction. But I wanted to be sure that it worked.

So we'll begin. We're just mic'ing the speakers and we're beginning in just a moment.

Good afternoon. I'm Tom Putnam, Director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. On behalf of Tom McNaught, Executive Director of the Kennedy Library Foundation, and all of my Library and Foundation colleagues, I thank you all for coming, and welcome those watching live via our webcast and on C-SPAN. Let me begin by acknowledging the generous underwriters of the Kennedy Library Forums, including lead sponsor Bank of America, Boston Capital, the Boston Foundation, Raytheon, the Lowell Institute, and our media partners, *The Boston Globe*, WBUR and NECN.

As you may have read, a few weeks ago my colleague, Tim Naftali, who directs the Richard M. Nixon Library, made history. In the words of *The New York Times*, "By opening a new balanced exhibit on Watergate, the Nixon Library exploded the tradition of Presidential libraries appearing more as celebrations of our respected Presidents, packed with official papers, iconic photographs and baby shoes than as objective historical repositories." Calling a spade a spade, the *Times* star reporter Adam Nagourney concluded, at most, Presidential libraries' "dark chapters in our country's history are traditionally ignored or at least understated."

As the nation marks the 50th anniversary of the Kennedy Presidency, let this Forum show the commitment of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library to telling the full story of
his official thousand days in our nation's highest office, which like all Presidencies had its share of triumphs and failures. And please be assured that any notion of there being an ongoing rivalry between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon had nothing to do with our decision. [Laughter]

JFK understood the full range of human experience. Having faced great success and a meteoric rise to power, as well as great tragedies in his own life and that of his family, he might have been speaking of himself when he stated of Robert Frost that Frost's "sense of the human tragedy fortified him against self-deception and easy consolation. 'I have been' Frost wrote, 'one acquainted with the night.' And because he knew the midnight as well as the high noon, because he understood the ordeal as well as the triumph of the human spirit, Robert Frost gave his age strength with which to overcome despair."

It is not only in our Forums that this Library hopes to unveil the full story of the Kennedy Presidency, but through a new website, JFK50.org. And showing no shame and taking a tremendous risk entrusting the technology to work while on national television, I'd like to use this moment to offer a crass advertisement, especially to those of you watching on C-SPAN, about the site which though it does not dice, slice or create julienne fries, does offer new generations access to this fascinating history.

If you go to your computers now, we'll also, for no extra charge, provide access to our new digital archives with over a quarter of a million photos, documents and videos. That's right, folks, two websites – JFKLibrary.org and JFK50.org – for the price of one. So please check it out now. Our archivists are standing by. As you'll see, we'll dim the lights now, we've used a graphic novel format to tell the stories of some of the watershed moments in JFK's Presidency. It begins with JFK's Inaugural, the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps, and now I'll show you the Bay of Pigs.

I won't go through the entire story but it's a three-day event, as you see on the bottom -- the 17th, 18th and 19th. And it's designed especially for young people to go through the
story of the Bay of Pigs and within each of the graphic events, there are digital assets that are part of our new digital archives. Let me show one of those assets:

Inside Cuba, that alliance with Communism was adding punch power to Castro's military muscle. Civilian militiamen and armed troops were receiving Soviet Bloc weapons. Not only automatic rifles, but tanks and MiG fighters. In a short time, Cuba would have pilots trained to fly the MiGs, and Castro would be vastly stronger.

**TOM PUTNAM:** So, again, you'd go back to the story and it goes through day by day exactly what happens. Again, you'll see the graphic novel approach in the hope of engaging young people's imagination. I won't show it here, but you could watch the debate at the UN and that film clip. There are photos. Here we go to the next day's events, the events on the 18th. And I'll flip through to the very end where there's a round-up, again, from the news. I know I'm going too quickly, but I'm hoping to tease you to go to the site when you're back at home. Let's watch this synopsis of the event:

The showdown came at dawn on April 17, 1961. The attack guns were in place. But the invaders had virtually no air cover. These films, taken by a West German reporting team, show the battle of the Bay of Pigs from the Castro side. Against this preparation, the rebels managed to move only 20 miles inland, and those able to move beyond the beach were trapped in swamp or high growth, burned off while the Castro militiamen advanced and watched for prisoners.

It was a tragedy on the beach and in Washington. A new President, faced with 1,500 restive Cuban exiles, armed and trained by the CIA, decided that the United States would neither mastermind nor impede the invasion. We would not be guilty of a Hungary in reverse, would not move personally to crush the bearded neighbor. The CIA had failed to encourage
the main underground elements in Cuba and the small band of invaders
was forced out, one by one, into the hands of Castro's forces. One writer
called the Bay of Pigs the perfect failure.

TOM PUTNAM: So we can bring the lights back up. We've organized this afternoon a
stellar panel to discuss the Bay of Pigs invasion and its aftermath, including most
remarkably, Alfredo Duran, who was born in Cuba, left Havana after Fidel Castro gained
power and then trained as a member of Brigade 2506 and participated in the invasion,
believing when he landed on the beach in the night of April 17th, exactly 50 years ago
today that he was going either to win or die. "We never believed," he states, "that we
might lose and live."

Peter Kornbluh is perhaps the country's most renowned expert on the Bay of Pigs. A
senior analyst at the National Security Archives at George Washington University, he's
An outstanding scholar, like a good reporter, Mr. Kornbluh is an expert on pushing
various federal agencies to declassify materials more quickly so that they can be analyzed
by him and fellow scholars, allowing for a more complete accounting of many major
events in our national history.

Tim Naftali, the history-maker I referred to earlier, in addition to directing the Nixon
Presidential Library and Museum, is a historian and author of four books, including One

And we're delighted to have back with us our moderator this afternoon, Adriana Bosch.
She is a native of Cuba, received her doctorate from Tufts and is a documentary
filmmaker for PBS's American Experience. Her most recent work was on Fidel Castro.

"Victory has a thousand fathers and defeat is an orphan," JFK stated extemporaneously in
his press conference in the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs and concluded quite simply that
the fault was fully his own by stating, "I am the responsible officer of this government."
In taking responsibility for the debacle, JFK's popularity skyrocketed – 83% favorable, 5% unfavorable, the high point of his entire Presidency.

It is hard not to despair now, 50 years later, to fathom our collective distrust of our leaders. It seems to me we've become a much less forgiving nation, disinclined to rally behind our Presidents, no matter their party affiliation, when they invariably falter in what is one of the most difficult jobs on earth. But one hopes that in an examination like this one and new exhibits that help illuminate the reasons why at times it is wise not to fully trust our leaders, and through innovative websites that seek to engage the civic imaginations of a new generation and shine a light on the darker corners of our history that we can, in the words of President Kennedy, "give our age strength to overcome despair and regain our footing."

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me now in welcoming Adriana Bosch, Tim Naftali, Peter Kornbluh, and Alfredo Duran to the Kennedy Library. [Applause]

ADRIANA BOSCH: Thank you all for being here. As you know, we have a very, very distinguished panel and my work will be very easy. They know collectively probably everything there is to know about the Bay of Pigs. So I think you're in for a real treat today.

Let me echo Tom's words by saying that President Kennedy called April 17th, 1961, 50 years ago the worst experience of his life. This was not a light moment. This was a very difficult moment and a very difficult decision that President Kennedy had to take.

There were 1,400 men stranded on that beach. They had nothing but ocean and a swamp in front of them, ocean behind them. They had been set on this adventure by the CIA, by a decision made by President Eisenhower in March 1960, a decision based on the belief that an invasion and a force of Cuban exiles would trigger a change in Cuba that would
be better for the Cuban people, better for the United States, and that the United States
needed at the same time not to be seen as having been the force behind this invasion. So
these were the three things that President Eisenhower set out to accomplish in Cuba.

One of the people who was in that invading force is sitting here with us, Alfredo Duran. I
would like to start this panel by asking Alfredo to share with us the experience of being at
Bay of Pigs and to start by telling us what were the expectations, Alfredo, that you had
when you embarked on that invasion, when you were on that boat, and when you landed
on those beaches? What is it that you expected would happen in Cuba?

**ALFREDO DURAN:** First of all, I think that we should all know that 50 years ago, by
this time, by this hour, two p.m., April 17th, we knew we were lost. Already our supply
ships, two of them had been sunk and the rest had to leave the Bay. The airplanes that
were supposed to be supporting us -- all B-25s -- were being shot down because of the
distance, they could not have the machine guns and the tail guns in the back of the
airplanes. So the Cuban air force just got behind them and shot them down.

Our supply airplanes could not come and land because they were also being shot down.
Our landing had been completely disrupted because we landed in sport boats that were
supposed to be landing on a sandy beach and were actually landing in a place full of
rocks. Most of them were running against the rocks, and we had to jump and more or less
swim ashore with all our gear, most of which had been lost. So by this time we pretty
much knew that we were in trouble.

The highlight of that invasion force for most of us who were in it was the sunrise of April
17th when we saw the coast of Cuba for the first time. We thought that we were going to
land, we were going to fight, we were going to win, and we would bring Cuba back to
democracy and the best for the future of its people and for the nation itself. That was our
highlight.
After that, it was all downhill. I have been asked to give my personal experiences so in a very brief time -- what seemed to us at that time to be a lifetime -- I'm going to try to compress it into five or six minutes. This is more or less what happened to me.

I was put down on a sports fishing boat, which was supposedly capable of carrying probably ten persons, and we were 30 or 40 in the boat with full gear. My boat ran against the rock and we were all thrown into the sea. We had to drop most of our gear so we could swim ashore. The moment that we were ashore, there was complete confusion because of the way we landed. We first started seeking out our leaders so that we could group together and continue in our plan, which was basically to go towards the city of Cienfuegos, which was on the road next to Giron. There were basically two places where we landed. One was Playa Giron itself and the other one was Playa Larga.

Once the complete confusion of that disrupted landing happened, the whole plan was immediately changed. Things were being done in a very ad hoc way. All of a sudden, my company, which was Battalion Third at that time, which was supposed to go towards the city of Cienfuegos, was ordered to go towards the small town of San Blas, which was basically a very small town, which was a crossroad, a road that was coming down from Havana, down through the swamp, and another crossroad like this that united the two roads that came down through the swamp.

The reason that we were ordered to go to San Blas is because the paratroopers, which were jumping off at San Blas, had been let down in the wrong place. Instead of landing in the city or the town of San Blas, they landed in the middle of the swamp and were either lost or had lost a great deal of their supplies. Therefore, they sent Battalion Three to San Blas to protect the road. We got there, we set up, and immediately -- about two hours after we were there -- the batteries of 120mm Soviet cannons and mortars starting arriving and started bombarding us. We were under the bombardment of those cannons and those mortars for three full days. We fought and nobody would cross the road, but we were under heavy bombardment. We had two mortars and two 57mm recoilless rifles and
the rest were basically M1 rifles. But with that we were able to hold the position during the three days.

One of the anecdotes that happened there is one of the leaders or the commanders of Fidel Castro's forces made a wrong turn and turned right into us where we were guarding the road, and we captured him. He was riding in a Jeep with a convertible of guards behind him and he gave up, he surrendered. And basically he gave us the opinion that they thought that the Americans were coming, that they really had a battle on their hands and that they were very, very afraid in the sense that they thought that we had a chance of winning.

When he saw the number of individuals that we were, that at that point there were only about 50 of us there and the type of armament that we had, he told us basically, "You're lost, you're crazy. If the Americans don't land, you don't have a chance." And we knew that by that time.

During those three days, we really did not have a great deal of people on our side who were lost. The Cuban forces really had a number of casualties. First of all, they could only come down the middle of the road because there was swamp on each side. And every once in a while they would attempt an attack with the mortars and the 57mm rifles; we were able to hold them back and created a great deal of havoc.

The other problem that they had is that a militia battalion was coming down the road and probably the last flight that our air force was able to make came upon them right when they were in the middle of the road and bombed them and created a number of casualties. I've heard that there was about 200 people that were injured or dead because of that bombing. I don't know, but that's the number that is thrown around. But by the end of the third day, we were completely without food, without supplies, without water, and without ammunition. We had a flight that came over on the last day, on the third day, that came in from Nicaragua and made a supply drop and basically the supply drop was rifle bullets
for Springfield rifles, and we were using M1 Garand rifles. So the bullets did not fit our rifles.

We knew we were in bad shape, and we started falling back towards the beach. We finally reached the beach hoping that two things would happen when we got there. One, that we would be resupplied, or two, that we would be evacuated. None of those things happened. We were at that beach without ammunition at the expense of the troops that were coming at us. Essentially, what we did is we did not surrender. We were out of ammunition and the best thing that we could try to do is get out of there.

We went into three different routes. A group of members of the Bay of the Pigs went towards the town of Cienfuegos, trying to cut across it or go around it and get to the Sierra del Escambray, the mountains of Escambray, to set up a guerilla scenario. There were already guerillas in those mountains, even though they were basically running away and hiding. We had been originally trained as guerilla fighters, not as an invasion force. The other group, which I was a part of, just took down the middle of the swamp to try to reach either Havana or try to reach the north coast to try to get out. And another group took to the middle of the highway, on the sides of the highway, trying again to reach Havana.

Very few were able to escape. The Cuban forces immediately formed almost a chain link around the whole swamp of Cienaga de Zapata, they had militiamen posted every ten feet or so all around the thing. So it was very, very difficult -- as a matter of fact it was amazing that probably 20 or 30 were able to get out of there.

I was personally captured while I was trying to cross what we call in Cuba a batey, which is basically the surroundings of a sugar mill where the workers have their huts and where people work, where the factory is and all that. I was waiting for night to come to cross it and try to get across it, and then try to hit the Cuban central highway to somehow either get to Havana or, if not, get to Santiago de Cuba, which I used to know pretty well.
When night fell, I started to cross the batey, and I was captured by militiamen with some dogs that barked at me and all that. By that time, I was so very, very deteriorated physically; I had not eaten for three days. When you talk about the swamp, you think that it's full of water. It is not. Part of that swamp was what they call in Cuba diente perro, which is sea rock. And there's no way to find water, there's no water there.

So I had spent quite some time without drinking water. And since we really believed that we would all be shot, when I was captured, I asked the militiaman that captured us, "Just give me some water and shoot me and get this over with." And he told us that, no, Castro had ordered that nobody would be shot, that we were to be taken prisoners and that our life would be spared, at least for the moment.

So basically, I was captured and I was taken to a hut in the Australia sugar mill, where there were already six or seven other prisoners there. We spent there probably a day and a night, additional day and night, and they kept bringing prisoners until there were about 40 or 50 of us in that hut. Later on, the next day, we were taken in buses to what is called the Central Sports Center in Havana, which is basically a sports arena where we were sat around the arena and we were processed, identified and questioned.

That is essentially the three days at the Bay of Pigs. I really capsuled it because of the time questions we have. But the most important thing was that, in spite of knowing that we were losing, we kept at it until we ran out of ammunition. And we were very, very lucky that Fidel Castro, for some reason, figured out that it would be in his political benefit to declare us prisoners of war and to blame the United States for the reason that we were there and to demand from the United States somehow a solution to the issue and create an international scandal with the invasion of the Bay of Pigs. But we were very lucky because without that probably we would not have survived. Had we not been declared prisoners of war, our treatment would probably have been different. A
completely new set of conduct had to be taken once we were internationally recognized as political prisoners of war. So we were very lucky in that sense.

We were very unlucky in the sense that we lost, that our dream was also lost, that as many as 104 members of the Brigade died, and that the end result of that is that we have had 50 years of Cuba living still in the 20th century without having a truly evolutionary process towards national reconciliation and democracy.

Thank you very much. [Applause]

ADRIANA BOSCH: Peter, before I came here I went on Facebook to see what the temperature of Miami was on Bay of Pigs 50 years later. And everywhere I looked, what you would see, still, was this reference to this thing called the Great Betrayal -- that had President Kennedy had one more sortie flown after the first sortie did not get rid of the entire Cuban air force; that if the veterans, the fighters of Bay of Pigs had gotten air cover while on the beaches; that if and if and if the President hadn't changed the location and had gone full force, none of this would have happened.

You wrote a book in 1998 where in a sense you took on this Great Betrayal myth and debunked it or questioned it based on a lot of documentation that you discovered. Tell us what is your story of what happened. How could this have happened to these men? And how could the United States have allowed 1,500 men to have this ending in Cuba that was then so important?

PETER KORNBLUH: It's a great question, and I want to talk about it. But before I do, I just want to say it's so compelling to listen to Alfredo Duran. I had the great pleasure of taking him and four courageous other members of Brigade 2506 to Cuba ten years ago for the 40th anniversary of the invasion, along with President Kennedy's sister, Jean Kennedy Smith, and other members of the Kennedy family, and Arthur Schlesinger and
Richard Goodwin, and other surviving staff members, really, of the Kennedy White House. The deputy CIA manager of the invasion, Robert Reynolds went as well.

We all sat around a big conference room table with Fidel Castro and his commanders talking about this history with him. It was an historic moment in many ways, which I'm sure Alfredo will talk a little bit about later, using history to bring the bitterest of enemies together and to discuss in a very civil way what had actually happened during those three days at what we call the Bay of Pigs, and what the Cubans routinely refer to as La Batalla de Giron.

And we learned a lot. We learned a lot about the Cuban side of this history, which in many ways hasn't really filtrated back to the United States where most of the history has been written, like you just referred to, by the losers, if you will, of the battle in Miami. We got Cuban documents declassified. We brought new US documents to the table to analyze those together with Castro and his commanders.

So one of the big documents that we got declassified at that point was the CIA's own internal critique, its own internal investigation done by its Inspector General, Lyman Kirkpatrick, of what had gone wrong. And as Adriana pointed out, the historiography of the Bay of Pigs has been divided into two camps – basically, more or less, the Miami-dominated camp of retired CIA people and former members of the Brigade accusing Kennedy of selling them out, betraying them. And then the Kennedy clique, if you will, the advisors, Ted Sorenson, Arthur Schlesinger, who wrote the histories and the memoirs of the thousand days here that John F. Kennedy's Presidency had, and those three days in particular at the Bay of Pigs and basically argued that the CIA had misled him about the Bay of Pigs. You have these kind of two competing discussions of what happened.

The truth of the matter is that the CIA's own Inspector General put the blame squarely on the Agency itself for engaging in what was essentially an overt paramilitary operation when it had neither the responsibility, as the Inspector General pointed out, nor the
capability of doing so. The issue really in my mind is not whether John F. Kennedy, if he
had authorized a second airstrike to take out Fidel's planes and create a no-fly zone over
the Bay, or whether he had given the green light for the US military to go in after Alfredo
and his companions when it looked like they were losing, basically sold out the operation.

What the history shows is that Eisenhower said to the CIA, "We can overthrow Castro,
but it has to be covert." Kennedy came in and he said to the CIA – who presented him
with a plan, by the way, of an open invasion in the middle of the day at the city of
Trinidad, which was hardly covert – and he came back to them and said, "Let's make this
a little less noisy, please. You should have an invasion at night and it should be an
isolated place." So he forced a change of the plan that was hard for the CIA to do in a
very short period of time, there's no doubt about that. But the point of the matter was that
the CIA was in charge of this because – and this is hard to say, but we have to say it – it
was an illegitimate invasion of a sovereign country. It was an effort to roll back the
Cuban revolution, but Fidel Castro had not attacked the United States of America. The
rest of Latin America was going to be very upset with another example of US
imperialism and a throwback to what was known in the region as gunboat diplomacy.

So two Presidents, Eisenhower and Kennedy, both said, "Okay, we want to overthrow
Castro, but it has to be done without us being identified. It has to be plausibly deniable."
And this was the restriction on the invasion that really did result in its failure.

The planes, as Alfredo pointed out, the Brigade planes had to fly all the way from Central
America to get over the beachhead to protect Alfredo and his companions. They had to
fly hours to get there, and they only had enough fuel to fly over the beachhead for about
an hour, hour-and-a-half, before they had to turn around and go back, unless they could
secure that airstrip there, which never actually happened.

Kennedy did actually authorize protection for them. And on my website,
www.NSArchive.org, you can hear him and his brother talking about why that also
failed, because the planes coming from Central America were on Central America time, and the planes that were supposed to fly cover for them off the USS Essex were on Eastern standard time. If they just got there an hour apart. And you can hear, as if you are sitting in the room with them, John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy discussing this on the telephone when the issue actually came up in a Senate investigate hearing several weeks later.

So those are part of the restrictions. You couldn't be trained in the United States. We couldn't use US forces directly. Kennedy didn't want any US pilots -- although actually four Americans did pilot those planes on behalf of the Brigade and were killed -- and that's the reason why.

If the decision was that we had enough of a stake in rolling back the Cuban revolution that we should invade Cuba directly and openly, that was one issue. That's where the debate was. But the debate at that time was: We'd like to see Castro gone. We can't take the costs of an actual invasion of Cuba because we've signed the UN Charter and it says that we're not allowed to invade other sovereign countries. Therefore, we're going to try to do this on the sly. Not quite on the cheap, because it was very costly, but on the sly. And of course, it didn't work at all. That's essentially the answer.

**ADRIANA BOSCH:** Thank you. Tim, plausible deniability. Peter was talking about the notion of becoming yet another example of gunboat diplomacy, relations with Latin America at the time, the Kennedy Administration not wanting to really hurt that. But you look at these things from the context of the Soviet Union, Cuba and the United States. Could you tell us a little about, number one, why Eisenhower is so preoccupied with Cuba in March 1960. And number two, what is it that in terms of US/Soviet relations is constraining Kennedy from really going out with a plan that is more overt? What leads him to want even less noise than Eisenhower was willing to put up with?
TIM NAFTALI: I agree with Peter, that that awful three days and then the activity that Mr. Duran suffered through was the child of the doctrine of plausible deniability. In response to your question, Adriana, I'd like to go back a bit and say that, to some extent, those days were a product of two different lessons from an event that occurred in Guatemala in 1954. The United States derived one set of lessons from the CIA's role in toppling the Guatemalan government in 1954, and the Cubans and the Soviets derived a different lesson.

The Soviet and Cuban lesson, which we only learned about after the Cold War ended, was that you had to create a cadre of people in a revolutionary army that would be loyal to the revolution. In 1959, when Fidel Castro came to the United States and said in many venues and in different places, "I'm not a Communist," his brother had sent a mission to Moscow to say to the Soviets, "Listen, we don't want to be … When we have the revolution, we expect to have" … because the Cuban revolution had two phases: the first was a bourgeois revolution to get rid of Batista. The second was a Communist revolution, and Raul and Che Guevara and Fidel expected there to be a second revolution. They said to the Soviets, "We're going to have a hard time because the revolutionaries who helped us overthrow Batista don't necessarily want a Communist country in Cuba. In fact, they don't. We need you to train a cadre of people in the Cuban army who will be loyal to the Communist revolution in Cuba."

The Soviets sent Spanish Republicans who had fought in the Spanish Civil War. They were getting old by then, but they were living in Moscow in exile and they spoke Spanish. The problem for the Soviets was that not many of them spoke Spanish. And they went to Cuba and they began the process, in 1959, of preparing for that day two years later.

The lessons that the Soviets had learned from the American success in Guatemala was, “If the army turns against the leadership of an aggressive country, you're going to lose your allies.” The American lesson from 1954 was, “These countries have very weak
governments. And all we need to do is a little shock and awe. Let's just scare them. Put a few armed guerrillas in the country, use a lot of propaganda, use the radio station. Scare the government. Scare the army. Say that there are Communists everywhere and the regime will collapse, because these regimes in the Caribbean and Central America are all weak."

Well, that was true in Guatemala. The Arbenz government collapsed when the army turned to Arbenz and said, "We're not going to support you anymore." The problem for the United States was that it didn't realize that it was engaged with someone else, that other people could learn lessons from American successes, and that they could actually prepare better for the next go-round.

The Bay of Pigs, I would argue, is Round Two of the Guatemala operation. By then, the Soviets and the Cubans were ready. Now, I believe that in some ways they were deceived as to when it would actually occur and that gets to a second point. But the fact of the matter is, we, our government – even though these are different administrations, we do have a permanent government; we do have civil servants; the intelligence community did not change very much; the military community isn't changed much – our government stood still, made certain assumptions about that area while it was dynamic, the situation was changing. Nobody thought to rethink the basic assumptions they had about regimes in that area.

The second point I want to make is about plausible deniability. This is really hard for us to understand today because most of, not everything, but most of the wars that we are aware of are very open. We can see them on CNN, or Fox, or what have you. And we declare war, most of the time. During the Cold War, because it was such a strange struggle with the Soviets -- on the one hand we had to interact with these people; we interacted with Soviet diplomats; we talked to the Soviet Union, while at the same time we were trying to undermine their government and the governments of their allies. It was a necessary hypocrisy given the nature of the international system in that era.
John Kennedy comes to power – and we know this from records that are kept in this wonderful Library – he came into power with two contradictory objectives in those first few months. On the one hand, he wanted to rid the region of Castro and the regime. On the other hand, he wanted to establish much better relations with Moscow. So while he is signing off on this operation, he is also signing off on an invitation to Khrushchev to meet for a summit conference in Vienna. The two sides had already decided, before the Bay of Pigs that they were going to meet for a summit conference.

Fidel, who learned of this from the Soviets, was furious. He said, "I'm convinced," he said to Moscow, "you are going to sacrifice me for that summit." The irony is it wasn't Fidel who was sacrificed for that summit, it was, I would argue, your Brigade. Because President Kennedy knew that if he embarrassed the Soviets by being too involved with this invasion by using American planes, by doing something that would make it clear that the United States was overthrowing the Soviet Union's key ally in the Western Hemisphere, a negotiation in a neutral country for a test ban treaty and to limit nuclear, the nuclear competition would be impossible.

On April 12th, 1961, five days before the invasion, the President announces in a press conference that the Cuban issue – because everyone knew that there was a lot of tension around Cuba – has to be resolved by the Cubans themselves. The United States will not participate and the United States military will not participate at all in the resolution of the Cuban issue. This is five days before the Bay of Pigs.

The Soviets picked that up, as did the Cubans. And Khrushchev, who was the leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev at the time said, "Aha, that's evidence. Kennedy is not going to invade. He is not going to send out that message if he were going to invade."

Well, when there's a debate over whether to have an airstrike on D day and whether there should be American planes flown in, you don't think that Dean Rusk, who was Secretary
of State, and McGeorge Bundy, who was National Security Advisor, and the President himself were not saying, "Well, look, this would contradict the President's April 12th speech. This will undermine our ability to have negotiations on arms control issues with the Soviets. We just can't." So there was an incredible tension between these two objectives, and that happens a lot in the Cold War. But in this instance, I would argue, it placed restraints on this operation that made it bound to fail.

**PETER KORNBLUH:** I just want to add a couple of points. There are a couple of other major international issues that go beyond planning for the summit. One of them is that we know from after the invasion took place and failed, Kennedy actually called in former Vice President Nixon, if I'm not mistaken, to discuss what had happened and say to him, "What would you do now?" And Nixon said, "I would find a reason and I would go invade Cuba." And Kennedy's response was, "We have a problem with Berlin with that."

And that was always part of the equation with the Soviets. If we just baldly invade Cuba, we give them license in the face of the world to say, "Well, if they have a problem on their shores, then you should understand we have a problem right on our borders and we're going to just invade Berlin." And Kennedy's position was, "And there goes Europe and the Cold War arrives in a way that I don't want it to arrive in Europe."

The second issue is that you are exactly right about Secretary of State Rusk arguing vociferously against bald US military visibility in this operation. But one of the reasons is that he understood that Latin America, even which we largely controlled in those days, would be very upset with a bald US invasion of Cuba. Fidel Castro had tremendous popularity in lots of parts of Latin America. And it would -- if we invaded -- be a return to that era of gunboat diplomacy, which the Latin Americans had rejected. We'd already gone through the Good Neighbor phase, of course. Plus, it would radicalize the populations even further than Castro and his accused subversion in the region was already doing.
So it would make the left ascend in Latin America and create all sorts of problems for our allied military repressive regimes that we were supporting. Those were the arguments that did come to fore not just with Kennedy, but I think with Eisenhower, too, but certainly during those last weeks when the debate was, “Do we have a contingency plan if Alfredo Duran and his companeros don't make it?”.

I should just add that Kennedy was told, “Yeah, the contingency plan is that the fighters will fade into the mountains and go guerilla, like Fidel Castro did, and eventually they'll be able to do what Castro did, and they'll overthrow Castro.” But, of course, the CIA failed to tell Kennedy very explicitly: “There was that option when we were going to invade Trinidad, which you've now vetoed. At the Bay of Pigs, there's only a swamp and the Escambray Mountains and the Sierra Maestra are nowhere to be found.” That didn't really get drilled into him.

TIM NAFTALI: One of the things that the US government didn't know was the extent to which the Soviets had already started providing military assistance to Castro. By the time of the Bay of Pigs, the Soviets and their allies, the Czechs and others, had given 167,000 rifles to the Cubans, 125 tanks. There were 41 MiG jets that were on their way -- they hadn't arrived yet -- also, 400 artillery pieces.

What we didn't know at the time, and wouldn't know actually until we got access to Soviet air records, was that the Soviets had made an investment already into Fidel Castro by this point. By the summer of 1960, the KGB changed the title – it gave its assistance to the Cubans a sort of a name and it was on all the files. Up to the summer of 1960, the name for the file was YOUNTSIE, which means youngsters; these are just sort of young revolutionaries. In the summer of 1960, they changed that title to AVANPOST, which means bridgehead. In the summer of 1960, Nikita Khrushchev extends a nuclear umbrella around Cuba. And he does it because the Cubans and the Soviets, whose intelligence wasn't particularly good either, thought that the United States was about to invade Cuba,
that the United States would do it in order to make Richard Nixon President in the 1960 campaign.

So the Soviets sent a message to the world that, "We're not going to let Cuba go." That message wasn't really received by the United States. And part of the problem, I think, in the discussions that occurred before the Bay of Pigs, in Washington, was that first of all, the discussion was not held by the entire group of the President's foreign policy advisors. Bobby Kennedy, for example, is not given the details, the real details of the invasion, but for a week before the event. There's no real hashing out of all the implications. Peter's absolutely right. Berlin was in many minds.

But nobody sat down to say, "Well, can this succeed? And will the Soviets let it succeed?" See, one of the unknown questions that nobody – we've never had to ask because it didn't come to pass -- was whether the Soviets would let the Castro regime collapse. They could have sent more materiel. They had jets on the way. They had already made a commitment to Cuba that was very important. And it wasn't so important not just because of the US/Soviet rivalry, it was important because of the Chinese/Soviet rivalry. The Chinese were presenting themselves as the vanguard of revolution in the international community and were saying, "We are, and the Soviets are not." And the Soviets were in a contest for leadership of the Socialist world with the Chinese. It would have been very bad for the Soviets to have lost Cuba in 1961.

ADRIANA BOSCH: Going back to Alfredo. All of this is happening. I remember being a child in Cuba at the time and looking over the horizon in the middle of this. As it became clear that the invasion was not succeeding, the people in my neighborhood certainly were ready to uprise. There were weapons hidden everywhere, weapons buried, and the moment was being awaited. The expectation became the planes will come. The image that we had in mind, that I had in mind as a child was, “You look at the horizon and the American planes were going to come.” Was that your expectation? Did you think when you went into that beach that the United States would ever abandon you? Or was
the expectation that if all else failed, the United States would come and save the day as Cubans always suspected?

**ALFREDO DURAN:** The expectations were that we would have the support of the United States. That's what our trainers were telling us. That was said to us once we were on the boats, and we believed that to be the case. We had been training under the auspices of the United States.

What Tim was saying was correct. The Bay of Pigs was to be the Chapter Two of the Guatemala invasion. As a matter of fact, we were training in Guatemala in Retalhuleu and the mountains surrounding it. One of the reasons, by the way, that I'm sure that Fidel Castro knew that we were coming is that it was the most publicized invasion in the world. In Miami, every corner knew where we were; everybody was recruiting publicly. There were people all over the place saying, "Take me, take me." Basically, everybody knew about it. Not only that, but in Guatemala, village people would come by the camps all the time. So they knew we were there and obviously many of them would tell their friends, and their friends would tell, and Castro would know.

When we were in Nicaragua getting ready to get on the boats, the port workers -- many of them belonged to the Communist Party -- had obviously told the Cuban government that we were on our way. I don't think Castro knew exactly where we were going to land, but he knew we were coming.

The problem that we had, the expectation -- and that's why I said that on this very first day, when we knew we were lost, was that the plan … If you took the Bay of Pigs plan on its face, you say, "God, this is a great plan. They can't lose." Because first of all, Castro's air force would be destroyed by our planes and those that would survive would be destroyed by American planes. Secondly, the underground where the CIA had spent many, many effort and many months organizing was supposed to create an uprising. And more important than that, was to blow up the bridges, blow up the highways, blow up all
kinds of communication that would lead to the Bay of Pigs. And if that would have happened, the whole process of attacking us would have been considerably delayed. But the problem was that the CIA did not let the underground know that we were coming because they felt that the underground had been penetrated by Castro's intelligence. So the underground did not know that we were coming. So they were not able to do anything.

Not only were they not able to do anything, but because the invasion began without them knowing, a great many of them – because Fidel Castro basically on that first day arrested two or three hundred thousand people in Cuba – and many of them, every one that he thought or suspected or believed or someone said that they were against him, were arrested. And that arrest, many, many of them were the underground of the supposed support for the Bay of Pigs invasion.

So that didn't work. The other thing that did not work was the air cover from our forces. They had to come at us through three highways that were right down the middle, swamps on each side. We had to have air cover to be able to stop their coming at us. So the whole plan looked great on paper, and it could have worked, maybe. We might still be there had it not been that it did not work. There was not the willpower to make it work from the very beginning, from day one, from the day that they did not notify the underground, from the day that they suspended the attack on the Cuban air force, which happened a day before we landed, from the day that the Cuban air force was not destroyed, from the day that our supply ships were sunk, from the day that we did not receive anymore supplies, and that was a willful decision made by the CIA.

For us on the beach, we never blamed President Kennedy. We did not know of all these conversations that were going on. We just were dealing with a group of people that had promised us support and did not deliver. And that was what we, in our mind, at that moment, believed that we were betrayed by the United States.
ADRIANA BOSCH: Peter, you brought up the issue of legitimacy. Putting that aside, how do you respond to Alfredo? Was there a possibility, whether legitimately or not, that this would have worked and with the United States’ support, the revolution would have been reversed?

PETER KORNBLUH: Ironically, the CIA and the people most immediately involved with the operation, the two top managers – one was a very interesting man named Jacob Esterline who had run the Guatemala operation. His code name was Jake Engler, if you ever read the famous book by Peter Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*. The other operational head of the invasion was a Marine colonel named Jack Hawkins, who had been detailed to the CIA when it became clear that this was going to be a paramilitary invasion.

I had the most remarkable experience of reuniting these two men who had not seen each other in 35 years. They had worked together for months to organize this invasion. The whole thing had gone sour 50 years ago, today, and they'd gone their separate ways. They'd never seen each other again, and I reunited them for the 35th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs in a hotel in Washington, to sit them down together, talk to them about what happened. They themselves, I have to tell you, felt betrayed by their own superiors.

We recently learned that they and the CIA people in November of 1960, just after John Kennedy had been elected and the CIA was getting ready to brief him on this plan, they, in a meeting, had determined that the plan would fail. We learned this from declassified histories, which we're still trying to get the rest of, by the way, so that we know the full history of the Bay of Pigs. And yet, the briefers went to Kennedy and sold the plan to him.

Then, these two managers -- Esterline and Hawkins -- on April 8th, 1961, went to Richard Bissell, the architect and deputy director of plans for the CIA, they went to his house in Cleveland Park, Washington, on a Sunday, and they said to him, "We're resigning because the plan is going to fail and you have not gotten the President to
understand that you need certain things when you invade a country paramilitarily. You need air cover. You need those planes to be gone. You need sufficient force to protect these men, and we don't feel they're protected. The plan's not going to work. We're resigning." And basically, as Esterline told me in the interview I did with him on the 35th anniversary, he said, "Well, Bissell kind of impugned my loyalty. He said, 'If you guys resign, certainly it will fail. And I think I can get the President to agree to the air support and the things that you want. But stay on board.'" So they agreed to stay on board.

Then, Bissell went and he tried to convince the President. He failed. And he agreed to certain cuts in the program. We can't really let go of this one issue, which is the preliminary airstrike that was supposed to take out Castro's little air force. Kennedy had authorized this, but he told Bissell that 16 planes were too many. Everybody would know they were US planes. It was just too many, so they had them cut it to eight, eight planes. And these planes flew and they attacked the air force, and not all the planes were destroyed.

Now, what did Fidel do? He told us at that conference that you and I were at – you were at that conference, too, weren't you? No, you were at the next one – he told us that, of course, he mobilized his planes. He had his pilots sleeping under the planes all night long, so if there was going to be another attack on them, they would move. They weren't going to be there. He had hidden them. So it was unlikely that a second airstrike would have taken out all of these planes anyway. But the CIA, in all of its wisdom, came up with a cover story that was just so superficial and ridiculous, that this was one Cuban pilot in a Cuban B-26, who had defected from Fidel's air force and had dropped his bombs on one air strip and come to Miami.

The plane lands in Miami and the reporters stand in front of it and they see that it's been freshly painted, that the gun turrets are in keeping with a US version of this plane and not with the Cuban version of this plane. And they start to report this at the very moment that
our ambassador to the United Nations is handing out this cockamamie story to the entire world. US credibility is destroyed in a second over this ridiculous cover story that the CIA seemed to have come up with in ten minutes.

TIM NAFTALI: This is really, really important to understand: that the United States government had jets. This is 1961. But this plan could not involve the use of jets. Why?

ADRIANA BOSCH: Plausible deniability.

TIM NAFTALI: We had to be able to pretend that the United States was not involved in an operation that it had organized and paid for.

PETER KORNBLUH: The little clip that you saw in the introduction, I think it was Walter Cronkite, actually, reporting, saying that the United States decided it wouldn't be the mastermind of this invasion, that's not true. The United States was the mastermind of this invasion, but under very restricted political curtailment that led to this. If we wanted to invade Cuba openly, the revolution would not have endured these 50 years. But there are reasons, and there are real reasons why we have not done that and cannot do that.

TIM NAFTALI: But I think, also, to be fair, President Kennedy, I think, understood that he was partly to blame. He did not just blame the CIA. Yes, he removed the head of the CIA, Allen Dulles retired. Richard Bissell, he was retired. But the President understood that he had put himself in a box. He made a decision not to let the B-26s -- which were American planes but made to look like they were Cuban -- that he had decided not to have the D day airstrike.

PETER KORNBLUH: The second strike.

TIM NAFTALI: The second strike. The first one was two days before.
PETER KORNBLUH: He canceled the second strike because of the embarrassment …

TIM NAFTALI: That's right.

PETER KORNBLUH: … of being …

TIM NAFTALI: And he understood he had put himself in a box. And it's this box -- we're just trying to explain to you -- which was a product of this approach in the Cold War where you do things in a way that you could deny. And, obviously, this is sort of the grotesque version of the outcome of that policy.

ADRIANA BOSCH: Why not just say no? The obvious question always arises in my head: Why did Kennedy not stand and say, "No, this is not possible, this is not going to work, I'm not going ahead with this plan"?

PETER KORNBLUH: The declassified documents that we've gotten out show that Richard Bissell, who was really the architect and the driving force, the man with the real hubris, and the man who thought because of Guatemala, which he had been involved in also, that Castro would just capitulate, essentially.

ALFREDO DURAN: The other thing is that for a moment there, there was a great debate over the disposal problem of the members of the Bay of Pigs. What would happen if the whole operation was canceled? You had 1,500 people who had been trained, who wanted to go and fight, who wanted to do things. You had a whole bunch of hundreds, even thousands by that time of Cuban exiles, who were expecting action on Cuba. What would happen if you dissolved the Bay of Pigs and bring them to Miami, those 1,500 people who were trained to do damage?

TIM NAFTALI: Something else happens. Remember, President Kennedy had only been in office a few months. A very important change in the plan occurs between
Presidencies. I mean, Dwight Eisenhower is President, but we have in our country a tradition where the outgoing administration is not supposed to be making important decisions in those last few months.

The plan -- and Peter will go into, I'm sure, detail about it because he knows it really better than anybody else here -- the plan changes. It becomes an invasion plan, and those changes occur when President Kennedy is still President-Elect Kennedy. So that what he's offered is a fundamentally different operation, I believe, than what Dwight Eisenhower was discussing in the fall of 1960.

ALFREDO DURAN: The whole operation at the beginning was to create seeds for guerilla warfare all over Cuba, and it turned into an invasion.

ADRIANA BOSCH: Then he backs away from that and it ends up being nothing.

PETER KORNBLUH: Just to respond to your point.

ADRIANA BOSCH: Then we'll have to go to questions.

PETER KORNBLUH: The CIA's own Inspector General said that because plausible denial was a pathetic illusion -- he called it -- the CIA people should have gone to the President and said, "Frankly, here are the facts. The operation should be halted." But they didn't do that. Instead, they kept going to Kennedy and saying, "We can succeed. We've got to send these guys. We've got to do something with them. We can succeed. And at worst, they'll fade into the mountains and go guerilla." Kennedy is the responsible person. He stood up afterwards and said, "Victory has 100 fathers and defeat is an orphan, and I am the responsible person." And he was, in the end.

TIM NAFTALI: One thing, personalities really matter, and we've all mentioned this man, Richard Bissell. Richard Bissell was King Midas, or the Golden Boy, whichever
metaphor you prefer. Everything he touched, until this particular operation, turned to
gold, not dross. He was behind the U2 spy plane; he was the one who managed that
whole project.

**PETER KORNBLUH:** The Marshall Plan.

**TIM NAFTALI:** The Marshall Plan. And this is really the point, since we're in Boston,
he was Walt Rostow's college professor and McGeorge Bundy had also studied under
him, although they were not that old in age. He was so brilliant. Many of them felt
whatever Richard Bissell, whatever Dickie -- they called him Dickie -- Bissell believed
in, it's going to work. It's always worked. He's never been wrong. I think that is a very
important part of the story. There was a certain level of hubris and trust among a group of
people who respected each other.

**ADRIANA BOSCH:** I have to break everybody's heart, including mine, but I think we
need to turn it over to the audience and begin with questions. I can't tell you how much
more and how fascinating this is. [Applause] But we need to move it along. Maybe next
year we should do it again, eh, Tom? [Laughter] Questions, please.

**QUESTION:** Fifty years later, does the naval base in Guantanamo have any economic
input to Cuba?

**ALFREDO DURAN:** I think that the United States for many, many years, says that that
base should be returned to Cuba. The only thing I know about the economic input that
that base might have to Cuba is that the rent for payment, which I think is $20,000 or
$40,000 a month, all those checks Fidel Castro has them uncashed in a drawer next to his
desk. [Laughter]

**ADRIANA BOSCH:** I have a question I'd like to ask and it's about the legacy of Bay of
Pigs and what it did for President Kennedy and what it did for the CIA, subsequently, in a
sense. How did the CIA then continue to become involved in Cuba? And how did that
damage the reputation of the Presidency and of the CIA?

PETER KORNBLUH: The legacy of the Bay of Pigs is something that we are still
experiencing today. Cuba, just this weekend, has organized its Communist Party
Congress on this anniversary, which of course is also the anniversary of Fidel saying that
Cuba's a Socialist state. So it reverberates in US/Cuban relations, and it reverberates in
Cuban history, where I think they're using it to say to their people, "We had a victory
over those Yankees 50 years ago, we can have a victory over the economic problems that
we confront today and move forward with another 50 years of our revolution."

But very quickly, there's the mixed picture of the legacy. On the one hand, for the
Kennedy brothers the lesson was, "We got zapped on this thing and we've got to come
back strong and really kick that little dictator's tuchus as hard as we can." And Kennedy
imposed the broader trade embargo. He authorized Operation Mongoose, a whole new set
of covert operations to create an uprising and overthrow Castro. He authorized something called autonomous operations, because he understood that the CIA's
relationship with you and your friends in the aftermath of this was not going to be
positive. So he just had the CIA give you money, have the exiled militant groups do their
own sabotage operations. And that went on into the Johnson Administration.

Of course, this continued aggression, which Fidel believed and the Soviets believed
would just lead to another invasion, really had a direct path to the decision to put missiles
into Cuba and the Cuban Missile Crisis. The legacy really led to, I believe, one of the
most dangerous periods on the face of the earth at that time.

The other part of the legacy though is that it was over getting you freed, you and 1,100
other of the Brigade members freed, that the United States and Cuba engaged in its very
first serious negotiations, starting with a meeting with Che Guevara and Richard
Goodwin, Kennedy's aide, in Montevideo, Uruguay, where Che Guevara says to
Goodwin, "Thank you for the invasion at the Bay of Pigs. It was a great political victory for us. It allowed us to consolidate the revolution and transformed us from the aggrieved little country into an equal." Then, Guevara offered all these kind of things that Cuba would do to improve relations with the United States. Kennedy wasn't ready. But within a year he had a negotiator to get you freed, who won Fidel's confidence. And there was a whole discussion about improving US/Cuban relations.

In the midst of this discussion of getting the Brigade members freed and the other American prisoners that were in Cuba out, our negotiator, a lawyer named James Donovan, is there. And Fidel says to him, "What would we have to do to improve US/Cuban relations?" And Donovan says, "Mr. Premier, do you know how porcupines make love?" And Fidel says, "No, I don't." And Donovan says, "Very carefully." [Laughter] "And that is how you and the United States will go about improving relations." Of course, another almost 50 years has gone by since then and we're still very carefully looking at the issue of US/Cuban relations.

ADRIANA BOSCH: Question from left microphone.

QUESTION: You were, I think, anticipating my question, which is how did folks come home? There's also a meeting Kennedy has with them in, I think it's Miami. And I wondered if we could hear that part of the story.

ALFREDO DURAN: The negotiations, once Fidel Castro captured us, declared us prisoners of war, the negotiations started. In Miami, the relatives of the members of the Brigade created what they called a family committee. And over the months, even Fidel allowed us to appoint a group of prisoners, one from each of the battalions, to come to Miami and talk to the US government and to the people here to try to get our rescue.

A price had been placed upon our heads. There was a schedule of four prices – $500,000 for the three chiefs of the Brigade; $100,000 for those who were upper middle class
leaders, other leaders of the Brigade, people who were more or less leaders or economic or members of the upper classes in Cuba; $50,000 for the middle class; and $25,000 for what they call lumpen, the lower class. So that came out to $62-and-a-half million.

That created several negotiations. The Cuban prisoners committee came to the United States twice. Every time they returned back to jail. And Bobby Kennedy, with the support of the family committee, created a non-taxable organization. And Bobby Kennedy basically pressured a whole bunch of US industry to donate money, equipment and things. Finally, tax-free $62 million were raised to buy that in food, medicine and tractors. And that's how the price was achieved, the $62-and-a-half million.

ADRIANA BOSCH: You were expensive. [Laughter]

ALFREDO DURAN: At least I know what I'm worth. [Laughter/applause]

ADRIANA BOSCH: I was going to say! In 1961 dollars. The gentleman on my right.

QUESTION: Thank you. It wasn't clear to me the positions that were held by Bissell and the two guys that came to see him on a Sunday, Engler and another person. Who did they report to? And the second part of the question, if in fact they reported to Allen Dulles, was Allen Dulles a holdover from the prior administration and did that have any affect whatsoever on the situation?

PETER KORNBLUH: He was a holdover and might have stayed even longer, if not for this: Bissell reported only to him. Bissell was the Deputy Director of Plans. He was the supervisor of the two managers, Hawkins and Esterline.

QUESTION: So they were all CIA, the three of them were CIA guys?
PETER KORNBLUH: No. Hawkins was a military Marine colonel detailed to the CIA for the timeframe of this operation. Esterline was a senior CIA operative, a former station chief in Venezuela, ran the Guatemala overthrow of Arbenz, and so a senior CIA operative.

TIM NAFTALI: Because of the secrecy of the operation, the analytical side of the CIA did not participate in designing the plan. So it did not actually represent the best thinking that the CIA had on the situation in Cuba. Also, because of the way in which it was organized, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who are generally the President's principal advisors on military matters, decided to give it a pass. They looked at it. They gave some advice, but they weren't aggressive in checking it because it wasn't their operation.

And one of the lessons that President Kennedy learned from this was to have much better, much tougher, much more aggressive military advice. And that leads to Maxwell Taylor coming into the Administration.

PETER KORNBLUH: The military had a code name for this operation, and it was Operation Bumpy Road. It was very appropriate. [Laughter]

There was one other factor to this whole operation that we haven't mentioned, which is that Bissell authorized an assassination plot against Fidel Castro in August of 1960 as part of this plan. Very few people knew about it, including Jake Esterline, who was running the whole invasion. And somebody, the CIA Director of the Western Hemisphere came to him and said, "I need a check for $80,000. And then I'm going to need another one a week or two from now for $80,000." Esterline says, "Well, I'm not signing anything unless you tell me what it's for." And he said, "You can't know what it's for because you're not cleared." And Esterline said, "Well, then you're not getting the money, the money from the Bay of Pigs budget." Which started, by the way, with a budget of $4.4 million and arrived at a budget of $46 million a year later.
Esterline finally was told, This money is to pay the Mafia people that we're working with to transport poison pills created by the CIA's technical services division into Cuba to assassinate Fidel Castro as part of this plan. And Esterline was actually against this, what he called the poison bullet component of the plan, because he felt that Bissell would think that they'd get rid of Fidel this way and create chaos and the invasion would succeed, and would attach too much importance to something that was unlikely to happen and not pay enough attention to the nitty-gritty parts of the operation that were necessary.

TIM NAFTALI: Adriana, you asked a question about legacies. I think the Bay of Pigs made the President a better decision-maker. I think one of the things he learned from this was to ask tougher questions of his advisors and to have better discussions. And you can see the lessons on display in the tapes of the Cuban Missile Crisis discussion.

PETER KORNBLUH: Absolutely true. "Don't trust the CIA, don't trust the military when they give you advice. Think about it for yourself."

TIM NAFTALI: Those tapes and the decision-making in the Cuban Missile Crisis, I believe, is the legacy of the Bay of Pigs failure.

ADRIANA BOSCH: Of course, Peter, that was just one in many assassination plots that really accelerated later under Operation Mongoose. The gentleman …

QUESTION: I think you're beginning to answer my next question. I was wondering, since Kennedy sort of allowed this to fail and cut the costs and cut the equipment and was concerned about his association with Khrushchev, why did he say yes to this thing? Why did he release it? Why did he let it go?

PETER KORNBLUH: We talked about that somewhat already. He was briefed in a way in which he was told that if he didn't go forward with this, there'd be this disposal problem. He, a new, young, virile President, will be accused of not having cojones to go
forward with this. And he was told that by his CIA Director, Allen Dulles. He was told by Bissell, who all of his aides worshiped as a god of intelligence, one of the best and the brightest, that even if they didn't hold the beachhead, Alfredo and his friends could fade into the mountains and keep fighting with US support. And he decided to let it go.

TIM NAFTALI: We also have to remember also that candidate John F. Kennedy made Cuba an issue in the election. And Washington is a mean place sometimes. If he had canceled this, you don't think there would have been leaks about how the President, this young President was offered an opportunity to rid us of the Fidel Castro problem? And unlike Eisenhower, who had taken care of Guatemala and taken care of Iran, this President wasn't up to the task. He understood politics.

ADRIANA BOSCH: I think that's a fascinating answer. All of it is, but the idea that this is a young President, three months into his Presidency, and he is really in a no-win situation.

PETER KORNBLUH: And let's not forget, he kept on Allen Dulles. You don't have life tenure in this country if you're the Director of Central Intelligence. Similarly, he kept on J. Edgar Hoover. He recognized that there were certain areas where he was vulnerable to political attack. And he ultimately gets bad advice, but he's the one who decided to take it.

ADRIANA BOSCH: The gentleman on the right.

QUESTION: Yeah, I think Mr. Kornbluh said the invasion was illegitimate. But I wanted to see what Mr. Duran felt about that. Also, I wanted to ask Mr. Duran what it was like at that conference, being in the same room with Fidel Castro.

ALFREDO DURAN: I obviously not only believed that it was legitimate, I believed it was my duty to do so. I was a young man and I was fighting for my ideals and for what I
believed was the best for Cuba. And I never thought -- I don't think that anybody that was in the Bay of Pigs felt that they were working for the CIA. We all felt that we were using the CIA to obtain our objective, which was to bring democracy and freedom to Cuba. So to me, it was not only perfectly legitimate, but it was my obligation to do so, and it was the right thing to do.

As to the conference, it was a very interesting conference. Peter put on a tremendous thing, which took quite some time to put together. One of the problems that it had was that the Cuban government at the beginning would not allow five members of the Brigade to attend, because their position was that we were mercenaries, that we belonged to the CIA and since members of the CIA were going to attend, there was no reason for us to be there.

Finally, they accepted the premise to go and we had some negotiations for our accepting, attending the conference. There were four, but the primary one was that we would not accept to be called by anybody in Cuba that we were mercenaries. That we were not mercenaries, that we were Cuban and we went there because we felt an obligation and we felt that we were doing our duty.

I changed my whole concept -- and it's too long to explain it now because we don't have time -- of the Cuban process when the Soviet Union disappeared. It was the first time in the history of Cuba that there was no foreign government influencing the decisions that Cuba could make. There was no longer Spain. There was no longer the United States. There was no longer the Soviet Union. That moment was too precious not to take advantage of, and I came out in favor of a dialogue between Cuba. I went and I came out against the embargo, and I came out against the present foreign policy of the United States to Cuba, which hasn't worked in 50 years; it isn't working now and it won't work in the next 50 years. [Applause] So my position was that I wanted to go and I wanted to talk, and I wanted to try to convince people that what happened happened, and that we should look forward.
Before I finish, I'm going to tell a small anecdote. Fidel Castro was explaining on a map the whole process of the invasion. He came to San Blas, which is the place where I fought and he was explaining how it happened. I raised my hand and I said, "Mr. President, it was not exactly that way." And he says, "Well, come up here and explain your version of it." So I go up and I start explaining my version of it and he called General Fernandez, who was vice president of Cuba at that time and who was truly the person who directed the military operation against us. He studied here in Fort Benning. He had been a military officer in Cuba. He was very well trained, and he ran the operations against us in Cuba. And when Fernandez came up, he says, "Well, Mr. President, the mercenaries came here," and Fidel Castro said, "No, no, no, we don't call them mercenaries. We call them companeros invasores." [Laughter]

ADRIANA BOSCH: The invading comrades.

ALFREDO DURAN: And the other thing that happened was he then called the person who had been throwing mortars and cannons at us for three days, who was a colonel, and when that colonel came up to the board, I was standing there and he came up to me and he stretched out his hand, and I grabbed his hand and we shook hands.

At that moment, Peter can probably tell you, the whole audience -- newspaper people, everyone that was in that room -- stood up and started applauding. And up until that moment, that place was like a refrigerator. It was tense. After that moment, the whole thing warmed up and we really, really got down to the discussions of what happened at the Bay of Pigs.

I went there without hate for anybody. I went there thinking of Cuba's future. So that's why I had no problem going. [Applause]

PETER KORNBLUH: I don't have anything to add to that.
ADRIANA BOSCH: I don't have anything. But we're going to give somebody an opportunity to …

QUESTION: I was eight years old when the Bay of Pigs happened. I have just the vaguest memory of it. I can remember the phrase Bay of Pigs, but didn't really know anything about what was going on. I remember vividly in '63 the Cuban Missile Crisis.

PETER KORNBLUH: '62.

QUESTION: Well, I remember it was '63, but you're probably right. [Laughter] My question really is slightly preceding the Bay of Pigs and the issue of Batista and Cuba being ruled by Batista before Castro, Castro overthrowing Batista. Was Batista a CIA type? Was he put in by the United States, Batista? Was he supported by the United States? Or is this a separate question. I don't mean to …

ADRIANA BOSCH: I think that is a separate question with a very long answer. And the short answer is, no, but yes. [Laughter] Batista came to power in a coup and the United States subsequently did have good relations with Batista. But at some point, toward the end of the Cuban revolution, the United States did withdraw its support from Batista, and it's more complicated than I think we can entertain. I think we have time for one more question on Bay of Pigs. Somebody's coming to the microphone.

QUESTION: I have a very specific question. When exactly did President-Elect Kennedy know about the Bay of Pig plans. Because there's the official answer saying that he knew after he was elected, and then there's the alternate answer saying that he knew way before, and that's why he asked Vice President Nixon, during one of the televised debates, what was the Eisenhower Administration doing about Cuba, precisely because he knew that Nixon would not blow the whistle on the operation. So when did Kennedy know about this? And was he fair in asking that question? I guess not, if he knew.
PETER KORNBLUH: We certainly can discuss this at some length because we've studied it at some length. Two things happened. One is that Richard Goodwin, one of Kennedy's aides and press agents during the campaign, on his own wrote up one morning in October a press release demanding that the United States … blasting the Eisenhower Administration for not doing more for the fighters of freedom. This was a phrase he coined long before Ronald Reagan came along and called the contras in Nicaragua freedom fighters – and kind of put the issue on the map before the debate. Then, the debate took place a few days later. And Kennedy decided to pursue this in part because from their polling, their informal polling at every stop along the way with the crowds, Cuba was an issue. Castro was an issue more than Khrushchev was an issue among the audiences. So they decided to take a hard line.

At that point, Kennedy had not been really briefed. He had had a briefing from Allen Dulles, but not in any way, shape or form about this particular plot. It was a much more general briefing. His more specific briefing only came in November, after he was elected.

TIM NAFTALI: If the candidate John F. Kennedy had been briefed on the plot, what he did in the debate would have been wrong. But I agree with Peter; there's no evidence that he was briefed on the plot. There is evidence that he got CIA briefings though.

PETER KORNBLUH: Right, but not about this.

TIM NAFTALI: Not about that. And frankly, you shouldn't be surprised because this plot was so closely held within the CIA, and the tradition in that era for the CIA was not to share. Now, Presidential candidates are more fully briefed, but I suspect they're not briefed on covert actions. I don't know for a fact, but I don't think so. But this was so tightly held in the CIA, it's almost implausible that he would have … It is implausible, I think, that he would have been briefed on a covert operation.
PETER KORNBLUH: So that you remember this history, there's another side to it, which is that Richard Nixon, in the debate then, says to himself, "Oh, my god, how am I going to respond?" And he says, "I have to"—this is to himself, he's basically thinking in his head, "I have to protect this covert plot." So he comes out with a whole statement about how the United States ... how it's irresponsible what John F. Kennedy is saying because the United States has all sorts of international treaties and such support in an invasion would be illegitimate— if I can throw that word out again. And he says this publicly, which is so ironic that he feels that he has to take the other side and offer the argument against a whole covert operation that he has been supporting more or less all along. And for many months, he believed that this had cost him the 100,000 votes that he lost the Presidency by, by appearing soft on Cuba.

ADRIANA BOSCH: I believe we are done. I would love to thank everyone here.

[Applause]

TIM NAFTALI: Thank you, everybody.

THE END