

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FJM-34: Report From A Cuban Prison IV
Lieutenant Diaz

535 Fifth Avenue
New York, New York
December 27, 1972

"She said the man in the gabardine
suit was a spy.
I said 'be careful, his bowtie is
really a camera.'"

"America"
Simon and Garfunkel

"Permission to enter with the detainee," shouts my
guard into the door.

A voice from inside the room, nasalized and unhurried,
curtly replies: "Enter."

The guard pushes the door open, motions me inside and
then directs me to sit in a straight-back, wooden chair
positioned directly in front of a desk. The desk too is
wooden and empty except for a glass ashtray that contains
several cigarette butts left there by the thin-faced man who,
behind the desk, is staring at me.

The guard asks permission to withdraw, receives it
with a silent motion of a hand, and then the lieutenant with his
gold bars on each olive green lapel and I are alone. The
lieutenant leans back in his leather chair while continuing
to look at me, his eyes small brown dots set into a white,
very white, even pale face. It's a long face that has a
birdlike quality to it: a sharp though not pointed nose, thin
mouth, protruding ears. A tight face that has no softness to
it, a face that adds to the dislike and fear I already feel
for him.

Only a few moments have passed, but the silence makes
it seem longer. The lieutenant continues to smoke, he's a
chain smoker, and seems to be in no hurry. The olive green
shirt he wears, bestows on him not only authority and power,
but warmth as well. He wears a long sleeve shirt, his winter
uniform so he doesn't feel the cold of the air conditioning
blowing into the room as I do in my sleeveless khaki overalls.

"My name is Diaz, Lieutenant Armando Diaz. Como andas?..... How are you?"

"Terrible. I'd like to know why I'm here."

"You don't know why? Really?"

"No. I don't."

"Well, I do. Because I ordered your arrest in the name of the Revolution. You've been detained because I have proof that you are a spy, that you've been spying against the Revolution. I know all about you. Everything. You've been under investigation for many months. I accuse you in the name of the Revolution, of espionage, of being an agent of the Central Intelligence Agency."

"Espionage? I'm no spy, I've never been a spy. I'm a writer..."

"You lie. You're an enemy of the Revolution. Your writing is nothing more than a facade, a facade to hide what you really are. I've read everything you've written and it's all a facade to penetrate Cuba, to come here and hurt the Revolution."

"But that's not true. I'm no spy. I may not be a revolutionary, but I'm certainly not a spy either. May I have a lawyer?"

"You don't need a lawyer here. I shall be your lawyer, your advocate and your prosecutor. That is the way it will be. The Revolution will not make a mistake. It protects the innocent when they are innocent. The guilty are punished. I advise you then as your advocate to tell the truth. If you're truthful, the Revolution will help you. I promise you that. Tell the truth and the Revolution will aid you. Lie and it will be your worst enemy."

"But this is a mistake. The Revolution has made a mistake."

"The Revolution doesn't make mistakes. You can be certain of that! I just tell you again, speak the truth and the Revolution will help you, lie and it will go hard with you."

I attempt to speak again, but Diaz cuts me off, finishing with his hand raised in the air. Rising, he quickly

pulls on the door and directs me into the corridor. Now there are no whistles, only the footsteps of Diaz behind me.

Halfway back to the cell, as we approach the glass enclosure where the guards of the cell block congregate, the white helmet reappears on my left. Diaz breaks his stride behind me and leaves out another door with a salute to my former guard. Then his footsteps once again fall in behind until we reach the cell. I step up into the shadows and the door slams behind me. The bolt slides into place, the lock snaps shut and it's dark again.

Immediately I begin to pace the ten foot extension of my cell, trying to work off the combination of fear and rage I feel for Diaz, for what he is doing to me.

But no more than a few minutes pass when the pin slips from the peephole and a guard passes me several items: a bar of soap, a towel and a newspaper. "These are from your Official," he says. "Only from him will you receive anything... Remember, he's everything to you. Your mother, father, lover, friend...everything." And with those words the peephole closes again.

The newspaper is Granma, the official voice of the Communist Party of Cuba. I'm delighted to have it and decide to read a different section each part of the day, thus making the pleasure of reading something last that much longer. Most of the issue is devoted to a speech that Fidel had given on December 22, a speech about a political prisoner the Cubans had captured and accused of being a CIA agent. How appropriate. Obviously, my Official had thought the speech relevant to my case and had ordered me a copy even before my first interrogation.

I didn't have to read the speech to know what it was about. I'd seen Fidel deliver it myself that night on television, watching it with a Cuban friend at the Hotel Riviera. Speaking without a note, his fingers bobbing up and down, Fidel carried on for two hours. Never would I have believed that I would be reading the same speech a week later, myself accused of espionage.

"....Therefore we will follow the normal procedures that have always been used in our courts of justice, which everybody knows act in accordance with the law. I think our justice is sufficiently well known for its great objectivity. Nobody here could ever say that charges were invented against somebody; that somebody was unjustly condemned. We could make human errors, but never the deliberate policy of injustice or arbitrariness.

...So it is the clear and definite position: We will commit no injustice toward anyone! We will invent no charges against anyone!

...we don't need lawyers here because we are the first defenders of any innocent person. We are the guarantee of all those persons, not the lawyers. . . . No lawyer in the world, not even the best lawyer in the world-- it depends on what you mean by lawyer--can do more to guarantee equity and justice than the Revolution itself has done.

The policy we follow with respect to the citizens of other countries, including U.S. citizens, is a principled policy. Any U.S. citizen who is innocent is given full guarantees here. We aren't going to give him discriminatory treatment for being U.S. It isn't Nixon who will defend them in this case, nor the Pentagon, nor their maneuvers nor threats of force. The Cuban Revolution's principled policy will provide the guarantees, the spirit of equity and justice that has always characterized this revolution, independent of the policies of their government.

Moreover, our country acts out of a spirit of equity and justice. On principle, it never lies, it never even makes an imputation without having the greatest certainty. This is history and it is well known everywhere. It has never said things it cannot prove."

Reading these "comforting" assurances from the leader of the Revolution, I conclude that Diaz must really believe that I'd been spying in Cuba. And if he does he must have reasons, even if unfounded and circumstantial. To review past associations, then, must be the starting point in convincing him otherwise. What does he know that I must explain?

Notable contacts would certainly include an uncle of mine who was a Deputy Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. Diaz knew about this man and my relationship to him because I'd mentioned my uncle to the Cuban Consul in Jamaica prior to my entry into Cuba.

The Consul's face lit up when, with some trepidation, I asked him if having a relative in the CIA would hinder my chances of getting approval for a visa.

"Don't you know, Chico" he said, throwing his head back and laughing, "that we all have relatives in the CIA, even Fidel. His sister works for the CIA. It's nothing. Don't worry about it. But what's your uncle's name....."

Perhaps Diaz thought the relationship to my uncle was something more than just an avuncular one. In fact, it could have been, in 1966, while I was studying in Europe and living with my uncle's family, an opportunity to work for the CIA arose. I'd spoken with my uncle and two of his colleagues about it, took an exam and then had an interview with a "Career Officer Training" official who asked me if I would consider going to Vietnam for them.

I declined for many reasons, mainly because the war was objectionable and there were so many other, more interesting things to do. Besides, even though at the time I had no objection to what I thought to be the legitimate function of the CIA, being an agent just wasn't me. I think the CIA felt the same way because I never heard another word from them after that last interview. But how could Diaz know that?

Looking at it from another angle, the association with my uncle was, in a sense, the best proof I could present to Diaz that I wasn't working for the Agency. Would that uncle have sent me into Cuba knowing my proximity to him jeopardized both of us?

Still, an arrest by the DSE was no game; it was unlikely that Diaz had arranged room and board for me just so that he could get the few bits of information I could provide about my uncle. Or perhaps he thought I'd invented my uncle as a facade, a cover to divert the DSE's suspicions? Whichever way one looked at it, it was an endless circle. Only trust or total mistrust would break that syndrome.

Slowly Diaz's words began to work on me. If he continued to press me, there would be no way to come out of this but a loser. Either I confess to being a spy and maybe receive a lighter sentence from the Tribunal or persist in the truth and wind up in prison for ten, twenty or thirty years. This depressing thought sends me back to have another read through the Granma Diaz had given me.

Surprisingly, Fidel's speech is a real morale builder for me. I reread it several times during the first week in solitary and find in it a source of hope that maybe the Cubans

really try to arrive at an honest judgment. If they do....? Fidel also spent an hour on the CIA's activities in Cuba, which is one of the reasons there are men doing what Diaz is doing. The hatred the Cubans have for the CIA is expressed so often that it borders on mania, perhaps a partial justification for my own victimization.

They have used all kinds of weapons against us. Imperialism has hardly spared an instrument of aggression in its abundant arsenal against our country. Thus we have a long list of acts well known by our whole people and well known throughout the world, ranging from subversive activities against Cuba, landing of weapons, organization of mercenary bands, infiltration of spies, saboteurs, arms drops of all kinds, caches of hidden arms along our shores by all means. We spent almost twelve years picking up Yankee armaments, twelve years capturing mercenary spies.....

These organizations operate under CIA control. The CIA invents names for some organizations. For example the RECE is an organization controlled by the CIA. But we know that there are also different forms of operations: sometimes they use organizations that they themselves create while at other times they tolerate and support elements which operate apparently independently. We evaluate different organizations, whose degree of complicity with the U.S. government varies in every case.

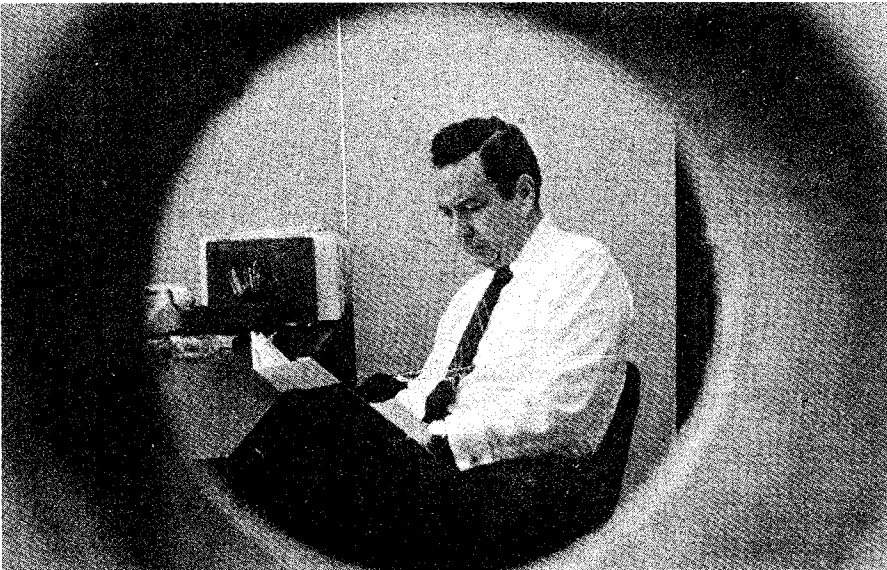
....Let us not forget the October crisis. And let us not forget what was part of our demands, of Cuba's five points: cessation of the pirate attacks. That was a demand presented ten years ago, immediately after the October crisis. Cessation of the infiltration of agents and spies in Cuban territory. Now those are demands that remain standing, fully. The United States must cease and declare publicly that it ceases such activities and such policies, as an international practice against our country. And then there will be no problem in the Caribbean.

According to the research I did prior to being arrested, the number of acts of sabotage, air drops, invasions, seizures

and assassination attempts directed against Castro and his regime came to 126 separate incidents over a fourteen year period. Two stories in the American press illustrate.

The first is taken from the November 1972 edition of True magazine that reported on an expedition of mercenary soldiers led by a former U.S. Army sergeant who had been going into Cuba with a Cuban exile group called Alpha 66 for more than a year. According to the author of the piece (who went along on the raid)

"The mother ship sailed from a secret location in Southern Florida shortly after midnight last July 8. She was a 35-foot long arsenal, laden with 5,000 pounds of nitrogel explosive and several hundred feet of primacord. Stowed below were six 50-caliber machine guns with 12,000 rounds of ammo, six 3.5-inch rocket launchers, and two dozen rockets for each, and an assortment of M-16s, M-14s, 5.56mm Armalites and sidearms. The 15 men aboard were Cuban guerrillas, trained and armed by ALPHA 66, the largest, most visible and most militant of the counter-revolutionary groups operating against the Castro regime."



A leader of the Havana resistance against Batista, Castro's first minister of public works, Manuel Ray organized the Cuban exile Revolutionary Junta. According to the San Juan Star of March 21, 1971 "The Junta limits itself to making the 'proper contacts' inside Cuba, motivating the people and infiltrating the government.'

The second is a report filed by Jack Anderson in the January 1971 Washington Post. He reported that over a ten year period, six attempts on the life of Fidel Castro had been made. "This raises some ugly question that high officials would rather keep buried deep inside the Central Intelligence Agency," wrote Anderson.

Anderson's column continued as follows:

John McCone, who headed the CIA during the six attempts to knock off Castro, denied emphatically that the CIA has tried to kill anyone. But ex-Senator George Smathers, one of John F. Kennedy's closest friends, told us the late President suspected that the CIA had arranged the shooting of the Dominican Republic's Rafael Trujillo in 1961....

Did President Kennedy personally sanction the plot against Castro? The preparations to assassinate the Cuban dictator began during the last months of the Eisenhower administration as part of the Bay of Pigs scheme. All six attempts, however, were made during 1961 to '63 when Mr. Kennedy occupied the White House. Smathers told us he once spoke to the late President about assassinating Castro. Mr. Kennedy merely rolled back his eyes, recalled Smathers, as if to indicate the idea was too wild to discuss.

The last surviving brother, Senator Ted Kennedy, could give us no insight. His brothers had never spoken to him about any assassination attempts against Castro, he said. He was aware, he volunteered, only that Senator Smathers had talked to the late President about eliminating Castro.

The sound of a cart rolling into the cell block and the flash of the light above my door signals the arrival of dinner, a happy ritual performed punctually every day, twice a day, at 11 in the morning and 5 in the afternoon. Somehow, the hours since my first encounter with Diaz have slipped away.

The food cart rolls along the corridor, up one side then down the other, locks snapped open, doors banged shut. Each occupied cell--I count 26 of the 33--is opened one at a time.

Only when the last one is closed and locked are the guards allowed to pass the tray of rice, soup, fish and bread into the next. Occasionally we have a surprise desert added in the corner of the tray, a spoonful of sweet preserves that probably came all the way from China.

This time--the hour before and during a meal--is the best part of the day for me, not only because the rice and soup always taste so good, but because each meal marks the passing of a section of time. It becomes a small victory to get from meal to meal. Days are measured that way: the first stage until eleven and dinner, a middle stage from dinner to supper at five, and a last stage from five until nine when we each receive six salt crackers (more than six are available upon request from the guard) to munch on before trying to sleep. Water is always available from a spigot in the cell.

The first day, the rice and fish are particularly welcome as the food somehow instills me with reassurance, the sense of survival expands. At least one won't starve in a Cuban prison.

In the beginning, the guards passing the trays tend to be distant, watching guardedly as I take the tray from them. But after a few meals, smiles appear, faces become familiar and a few words are offered...."como andas?" We exchange brief tips on baseball (shortstop is a favorite position), complaints about the weather (it's too cold) and news about the 1972 sugar harvest (uneasy comments about draught).

Done, the ritual of the meal is only completed when the tray and pewter spoon have been washed clean under the spigot in the corner of the cell. Otherwise the guards who return will not accept them. One learns that lesson the first day. Before they do return, however, I have searched out a small space in the corner of the wall and started my calendar with the pewter spoon. The pink stucco falls away, leaving a little line in the wall, an unoriginal symbol of one day in number eight.

Frank McDonald

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NOTES

1. The total number of intrusions and landings made by Cuban exile groups is hard to determine. But culling the files of Granma, the Miami Herald and the New York Times, the figure 126 seems reasonable. A year by year listing follows:

1959	12	1965	11
1960	17	1966	5
1961	26	1967	3
1962	25	1968	3
1963	9	1969	2
1964	6	1970	3
		1971	2
		1972	2

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