

Botched Coups and Failed Assassinations : The Bay of Pigs

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**Midnight Facts for
Insomniacs**

Podcast Transcript

Today we're going to be diving deep into the Bay of Pigs. Cause it's a body of water. The bay of pigs disaster was an attempt by the United States to violently overthrow the government of Cuba, and the failure of the plot would humiliate America and the Kennedy

administration, and lead to multiple hamfisted, comically inept attempts to assassinate Fidel Castro. The invasion was a terrible idea, combined with terrible execution, and it led to another catastrophe that we'll be covering at a future date: the Cuban missile crisis, which is arguably the closest the world has ever come to a full-fledged nuclear Holocaust.

The bay of pigs was more than a military misfire, it was an American national tragedy on top of a public relation's disaster. But to explain this failed coup, we need to first explore some successful ones.

The story technically begins in Cuba on January 1st 1969, when the revolutionary forces of

Fidel Castro overthrew the dictatorship of Fulgencio Batista. Now Batista himself was a coup veteran, he had overthrown the Cuban government twice within a span of twenty years. First, as a member of the Cuban military he led the 1933 Sergeants uprising, which ousted the aspiring dictator Gerardo Machado. Batista then served as chief of staff in the new government before eventually running for president in 1932. When it became clear that he wasn't going to win, Batista graciously stepped aside, acknowledging that the untainted democratic process is far more important than one man's political ambitions. No. He seized power and with American support and financial backing,

transformed the country into a police state that catered to organized crime. Sounds like an oxymoron, but not really. While dissidents were purged and persecuted, crime flourished. Havana became a hotbed of hedonism as Batista forged ties with organized crime syndicates. Playwright Arthur Miller described Havana in the 1950s as the mafia's playground, with gambling and prostitution and drugs readily available to criminals and casual tourists alike. Kinda sounds like a good time, I gotta be honest. Other than the brutal repression of free speech and torturing of dissidents etc. it was like Vegas with death squads. So, more exciting. Meanwhile, the United States leveraged its

relationship with Batista—which was mostly based on the US providing weaponry—to sink its claws deeper and deeper into the Cuban economy. “By the late 1950s, U.S. financial interests owned 90% of Cuban mines, 80% of its public utilities, 50% of its railways, 40% of its sugar production and 25% of its bank deposits—some \$1 billion in total.” I had always assumed the economy of Cuba was 95% cigar-based, 4% rum and 1% luxurious beards. Also fried plantains. When I was in Miami that was all I ate. I could live on cubanos and fried plantains. I wouldn't live long, but I'd live well. So while the Batista regime was sucking up to America and catering to the mafia, a now-infamous Cuban lawyer and left-

wing political activist named Fidel Alejandro Castro Ruz was making moves. As the son of a wealthy Spanish farmer, Castro was an unlikely communist sympathizer. His origin story has echoes of Osama bin Laden: born to wealth, radicalized at a young age, he left the country to form a revolutionary party in Mexico that included future icon of militant guerrillas and star of angst-y hippie t-shirts Che Guevara. That guy has had a long and storied legacy as a silhouette. He's killing it with the merch. Does he have family, do they get a cut? I hope so.

So Castro, as mentioned... not a Batista fan. Anti Drax. Like anti-vax, but Guardians of the Galaxy? No? OK. We actually get a bonus in this episode: two

failed coups for the price of one. Because Fidel Castro attempted to overthrow the Batista government in 1953, and the quagmire that followed was actually very similar in some ways to the Bay of Pigs fiasco. First off, his coup attempt involved a squad of revolutionaries known as "the movement," and I'm not sure how I feel about that. What type of movement are we talking here? It ended up being mostly "bowel." Castro's revolutionary force consisted of a total of 165 soldiers. They departed for their target—the Moncada army barracks—in 16 cars, but only 13 actually arrived. I'm assuming the others did some quick math. "165 soldiers?" Or they sobered up on the ride over. The ragtag group was quickly

crushed; many of them were killed in the fire fight, others were captured and tortured, and Castro was thrown in jail. While incarcerated Castro continued recruiting followers, this time for an organization he was calling "26 of July movement," which is at least more specific than "movement," he added a couple words. The problem is that 26 July referred to the date that he and 164 other idiots were humiliated during their adorable failed revolution. It's like renaming a football team, and the new name is the date you lost the Super Bowl. We must commemorate this crushing loss. While in prison he maintained contact with his followers outside the jail, he was doing some major

networking while also diving deep into the study of Marxist and Leninist communist principles.

The one incident I kind of enjoyed reading about, at one point during his incarceration Castro was thrown into solitary confinement because Batista visited the prison, and Castro and some compatriots spontaneously burst into anti-Batista songs.

Musical trolling. But also, what kind of reception was Batista expecting? Toss a bunch of people in jail and then show up to gloat, and they're supposed to throw confetti? I feel like he's lucky he just got hit with some songs. They could've pulled a silence of the lambs, what was that guy's name, Miggs? Could've been worse. Castro had been

sentenced to 15 years but only served two, he was released to "demonstrate batista's mercy" aka to placate the masses, and also because no one was worried that the spoiled rich kid who tried to overthrow the government with seven dudes and some busted cars was a genuine threat. So Castro moved to Mexico, met Che Guevara, and began traveling and recruiting internationally while planning his next coup targeting Cuba. He was able to muster up a total of 81 dissidents, less than last time, and they purchased a rundown yacht called granma. I'm not making this up. At points during the crossing from Vera Cruz to Cuba, Castro's unstoppable force of 81 soldiers had to work together to bail water out

of granma, which had sprung multiple leaks. They somehow made it to Cuba, and fled into the hills, forming a guerilla army and once again focusing on recruitment. Probably a good idea, might want to at least get in the triple digits before you take on a national army. Batista, however, seemed determined to help Castro rally Cubans to the cause by acting like the idiotic despot he was... he tried to stomp out the guerillas with an all-out assault on the jungle that accomplished very little except displacing and pissing off the natives. Even the United States withdrew their support from Batista, which is a bad sign; they were like "wow, this guy is too fascist and dictatorial even for us," and without

American support, the writing was on the wall. Batista fled the country and Fidel Castro, who had become something of a rogue celebrity, eventually took power. Castro initially denied being a Marxist or socialist, and then immediately set about nationalizing industry and seizing land from rich Americans and wealthy Cubans to utilize for government purposes or redistribute. "I am not a Communist! I just believe the state should control the means of production and that the proletariat will inevitably rise to shed the blood of the corrupt, capitalist bourgeoisie. How dare you accuse me of believing the philosophy clearly underlying my actions! See, the problem here is that you're paying attention to what I'm *doing*

instead of what I'm *saying*. Common mistake. Read my lips: not a communist. Now get in the bread line." Anyway, love him or hate him, Castro in those first years did manage to illustrate many of the positive aspects of socialism/communism. He expanded healthcare and education, built housing for the homeless, and raised the quality of life for many low-wage workers. And this is why communism is so appealing, especially if you're struggling or starving. Government cheese is still cheese. And some cheese is always better than no cheese. Waiting in line for bread is better than getting no bread at all. But one of the huge problems with communism is that non-communist countries are

always going to be more attractive to the wealthy and educated, because they're willing to pay more. And sure enough, upper middle-class and highly educated Cubans saw their opportunities for wealth and power slipping away, and they began abandoning the island. Educated Cuban immigrants poured into Miami, example of the so-called "brain drain" that can occur when doctors and engineers etc seek more lucrative opportunities outside of their own countries. Castro increasingly aligned himself with Soviet Russia, and America was super triggered. A trade war ensued, in which the United States placed embargoes on Cuban goods—foreshadowing-- and as a result Castro

seized even more land and investments in Cuba that were owned by Americans. So President Dwight D Eisenhower authorized the CIA to overthrow Castro's government, allocating a budget of \$13 million for the task. That sounds like not a lot, even for 1950s money. Like it's a lot for me, but not enough to take down a government. If someone gave me 13 mil, I'd be like thank you so much that's amazing, and then if they were like oh btw you have to take down the Cuban government with that I'd be like ooh. We should rethink this plan. I could take down like, a Tree Fort with 13 million. Maybe a medium-sized Boy Scout troupe. What was with everyone in the 50s trying to bootstrap a revolution with chewing gum and paper clips?

You're not a starving group of militants you're the United States government. Don't be a cheap bastard.

So all of this prelude provides the backdrop for one of the most inept, boneheaded, embarrassing boondoggles in the entire history of boondogglehood.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy becomes the 35th American president on January 20, 1961. As a new president, I can only imagine the strangeness of stepping into the shoes of the most powerful human on earth, and realizing you don't know half of what's been going on behind the scenes. A new president becomes privy to all of the classified information and all the

covert operations that were initiated by their predecessors and hidden from the American people. On day one, you get to see the aliens. On day 2, they tell you that you're invading Cuba.

Eisenhower had left office before enacting the Cuba plan, or using any of the generous \$13 million that he'd authorized for regime change. But the plans had been drawn up and the wheels were in motion for the first version of the invasion plan, so called operation Pluto. Already a bad sign. Why choose the least inspiring heavenly body? Or the least inspiring Disney dog. Well I guess it's better than goofy. But I'm guessing they meant the planet. And there are other, cooler planets out there. Operation Neptune, that

sounds cool. Did they run out of other planets? That's how sketchy America was in the 60s, they were overthrowing so many sovereign governments that they ran out of planetary codenames. Operation Pluto? Operation "barren icy rock" is not going to go well. Might as well use Halley's Comet, operation filthy snowball. That's not a confidence-inspiring name for a military operation. So I mentioned that Kennedy inherited this plan, but I want to be careful not to absolve him of responsibility. Like I said, the wheels were in motion, but he still could have called it off. He had his hand on the emergency brake. The President is the decider, as GWB famously said. And he should've called it off, especially

after it was determined that even the pathetically named "operation Pluto" wasn't going to be feasible, and would have to be downscaled. The initial plan was to land in the town of Trinidad, but that operation was scrapped because the available landing space would've required using a different kind of aircraft which would have immediately identified the invaders as American. And as we'll see, this was a big no no. When your government wants to do a thing, but after that thing is done they don't want anyone to know that they did that thing, that's red flag number two. First red flag was calling the operation Pluto, second red flag was trying to be sneaky bastards.

So the original version of

the operation had three phases: First, bomb Cuba's airfields in a surprise attack, with planes painted to look like Cuban aircraft, hoping that the world would believe that members of the Cuban military had suddenly gone rogue and bombed their own planes. Taking out Cuba's aircraft would cripple Castro's counterattack, turning the battle into a ground war in which the invaders (along with all of the citizens who were supposedly going to rise up and go full guerilla-warfare) would have a fighting chance.

Phase two: repeat phase one. There would be a second airstrike to take out any planes that were missed the first time.

Phase three: BONZAI.

Invasion via sea, progressing to land, and

simultaneously by air... paratroopers would be dropped in the interior of the country to sow fear and discord and kill lots of Cubans.

There's a great breakdown of the entire fiasco

From [CIA.gov](https://www.cia.gov), which should be taken with a slight grain of salt, but at this point pretty much everything about the Bay of Pigs invasion is public, so there's only so much revisionism they can try to apply to history. For the most part they describe in unflinching detail all of the mistakes and "mishaps"; the only difference is that they pretty much blame Kennedy for every damn thing. "Kennedy thought changing the invasion site from Trinidad would make future deniability of US involvement more

plausible, so he gave the CIA four days to come up with a new one. This presented an array of problems, namely, the Bay of Pigs was one of Castro's favorite fishing holes. He knew the land like the back of his hand. He vacationed there frequently and invested in the Cuban peasants surrounding the bay, garnering their loyalty and admiration. Additionally, the Escambray Mountains, the designated escape site, was 50 miles away through hostile territory. The bay was also far from large groups of civilians, a necessary commodity for instigating an uprising, which may be a moot point, as the bay was surrounded by the largest swamp in Cuba, making it physically impossible for any Cubans wanting to join

the revolt to actually do so." I love their passive-aggressive shade-throwing at a dead guy. Tossing an assassinated president under the bus. Thanks a lot, guy who can't defend himself. Do you think they would have published this on their website if Kennedy were still alive? Now with all that said, they aren't necessarily wrong. It's the Big Lebowski principle: "Am I wrong, Dude?" "You're not wrong, Walter, you're just an asshole."

So operation Pluto was out the door and it was replaced by operation Zapata. Operation shoe. Someone was digging for rock bottom. They were like, "Pluto is pretty bad, but we can do worse." I believe it was actually called Zapata because the

landing location would be east of the zapata peninsula. Still. You don't need to use the location as the name of the mission. At no point had they been planning to land anywhere near Pluto, so clearly you have carte blanche when it comes to naming your mission. Be creative. I have faith in you, America...not to do the right thing, but at least to harness the creative power of your naming departments. So here was the brilliant plan. As a result of Fidel's communist policies, many salty ass cubans had up and bailed or been expelled from the country. And as you know, Florida is super close to Cuba. The shortest route is about 90 miles. So there was—and to this day still is —a large population of angry ex Cubans in Florida who are

itching to take back their country. In particular members of the anti-Castro Frente Revolucionario Democrático (FRD) were seen as potential American allies. So the American government figured they could recruit these ex Cubans, train them, equip them with American military equipment, and set them loose on Castro. With a total of \$13 million. And here's where it becomes really brilliant: the Americans predicted that an invasion would immediately spark all of the anti-Castro forces in Cuba to rise up in solidarity and do the dirty work for them. Because when has this not worked? Oh yeah, like five minutes ago. And of course, the best part: they had to

somehow ensure that the invasion didn't look like an American military operation, because with Cuba's status as a Soviet ally, incursion by the United States could be seen as an act of war and trigger World War III. Which would almost happen a little bit later, spoiler alert. So in order to stay under the radar so to speak, they couldn't use the most modern US military technology. They would instead use obsolete B-26 bombers, of world war 2 fame, painted in the colors of the Cuban Air Force. Feeble. "Yes, I realize this looks exactly like an American World War II bomber. But as you can clearly see, someone has spray painted across it "not an American World War II bomber" in large block letters.. Ergo...ipso

facto, occum's razor tells us...this cannot be an American world war 2 bomber." It was a silly plan...like, the paint was still drying on these things. Incidentally, one of the original versions of the plan called for producing sonic booms over Havana to terrify and confused the populace, but that was rejected because there was concern that the tactic would seem too obviously American. Apparently America had used this tactic—the equivalent of shouting "boo" super loudly—in combat before. Some CIA guy suggested this and everyone was like nah, that's just way too US. everyone in Havana would've been like "what the hell? Obnoxious noises from the sky while we're trying to eat delicious

plantains? fucking America." I love that we are the country of annoying noises. So the name that the American military devised for this crack force of hastily slapped together Castro-haters would be brigade 2506, named after the serial number (or member number) of one of the participants who died during training exercises on Useppa Island, which had been leased by the CIA for this purpose. And again, so many naming options. Don't name your invasion force after a dude who blew himself up. The dude who died, by the way, his name was Carlos Rafael Santana Estevez. And here's the thing, it's staring right at you, just call the platoon the Carlos Santana brigade and even if it's a total disaster, the

surviving members can moonlight as a mind-blowing psychedelic rock band. From [CIA.gov](https://www.cia.gov):
"Unbeknownst to the trainers, although likely suspected, sprinkled amongst the recruits were double-agents, working in tandem for Castro, sharing the intelligence that they collected on the upcoming invasion."

And in yet another feeble attempt at deception, the American military tried to convince 1,400 recruits that brigade 2506 was being sponsored, not by Americans, but by wealthy Cuban exiles. Members of the brigade immediately began referring to their benefactor as "Uncle Sam."

Just over a week before the invasion, on April 7, 1961, the New York Times

broke the story of America's plan to oust Castro in an article titled, "Anti-Castro Units trained to Fight at Florida bases," which included detailed descriptions of the behind-the-scenes machinations, including the assertion that "unmistakable signs" that plans for an invasion of Cuba were in their final stages." The only thing they got wrong was the number of invaders, estimating that "4,000 to 5,000 men would be involved." Presumably this was because the Times and all of their sources realized that attacking with anything less than 4,000 men was absolute suicide. To demonstrate the clumsiness of this supposedly covert operation, the paper notes, "the preparations

against Dr. Castro are an open secret. They are discussed in the streets, Cuban cafes and restaurants and almost everywhere that two or more Cubans congregate. Local newspapers openly refer to incidents in camps."

The John F Kennedy administration went into panic mode, and mere days before the invasion, Kennedy took questions from reporters. And in no uncertain terms, denied everything. This was some impressive bald-faced lying. He said, " there will not be under any conditions an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces. And the government will do everything they possibly can... To ensure that there are no Americans involved in any actions inside

Cuba" "I did not have sexual relations with that woman." As you like to say, "these are lies."

On April 14, 1961, brigade 2506 set sail from Nicaragua aimed at the bay of pigs. The entire operation was an absolute clown car from day one. Perhaps the most vital element of the attack took place the following day, an eight plane aerial attack on Cuban airfields. This portion of the attack was known as operation puma. Finally, a goddamn bad ass operation name. Cheers to whoever was in charge of this one. So the obviously American planes, painted with bright "not American planes" markings, met with mixed success. One of the planes immediately diverted course due to low

fuel, landed in the Cayman Islands, and was seized by the United Kingdom. At another airfield, three American planes were able to destroy a large number of Cuban aircraft, all of which had long been non-operational. And one of the attackers was taken down by anti-aircraft fire. Oops. Not a great start. Within ninety minutes of the airstrike, the Americans orchestrated yet another hamhanded ruse involving a fake defector from the Cuban military. A member of Brigade 2506 took off toward Miami in one of the American planes that had been outfitted to look like a Cuban FAR Aircraft. The plane had been rubbed with dirt, and, just to really sell the drama, for good measure the American's had shot it full of holes.

You know, for authenticity, and to make this guy's flight just a little more harrowing. They even included fake flight logs, the whole deal. He landed in Miami and claimed to have defected from the Cuban Air Force, and told a wild story about how the population was rising up, etc. The United Nations convened to investigate, Cuba cried foul and called out the Americans, but American ambassador to the United Nations, Adlai Stevenson, held up a photo of the fake aircraft and yelled a bunch of BS about how clearly America was being vilified.

Ironically, Stevenson wasn't aware of the charade, and in a cinematic plot twist, the photo that he held up clearly showed that the aircraft had a metal nose

cone, as opposed to the plastic ones used by actual FAR aircraft. So he's up there waving around supposed evidence of America's noninvolvement while actually waving around the evidence that would prove Americas involvement. Awkward.

This is when many historians believe that Kennedy made a fateful mistake by not following up with the planned second airstrike. The brewing United Nations brouhaha had spooked him, and he was terrified that America was going to be unmasked as the perpetrator, but in retrospect the unmasking was inevitable, and another airstrike might've actually been successful. At least according to some optimistic historians. That

sounds like a lot of nonsense to me, because the entire invasion was predicated on the idea that anti-Castro forces would rise up in response to the American invasion, and I don't see that happening regardless of whether or not the Cubans had their air power intact. I once again love the official CIA description of Kennedy calling off the additional airstrike. "Late in the evening of April 16, Kennedy made the decision to cancel the air strikes set to destroy the remaining fleet of Cuban bombers. The decision was so last minute that the Brigade pilots were sitting on the runway, taxied in position for takeoff when they were told to stand down...This last minute cancellation forced leadership to work

furiously through the midnight hours, reworking and revising their plans, racing the sun as it climbed into a cloudless sky the morning of April 17, 1961: D-Day." So thanks again, corpse. This reads like a list of workplace grievances. "We barely had enough planes to bomb anyone in the first place, and then we had to work overtime on a Saturday! I missed Greg's BBQ, it was a disaster. Also, lots of soldiers died."

Phase three. The nighttime invasion of April 17th actually targeted two separate beaches code named red beach and blue beach. As the boats approached shore, the invaders were surprised to discover that a bed of

seaweed they had previously spotted... wasn't. It was in fact a coral reef, which doesn't look much like seaweed but ok. A coral reef is very un-seaweed-like in a number of important ways, most notably when it comes to the qualities of solidity and sharpness. And permeability.

Seaweed: very permeable, coral reef, less so. other things that are permeable...rubber boats. All boats, really, depending on the substance doing the permeating. So the invaders' radios and weaponry and ammunition were all lost or soaked during the botched landing.

So Castro was awoken at 3:15 Am and quickly mounted a counterattack. From the CIA account: "Once ashore, they were

met instantly by Cuban armed forces who outnumbered them. The salvaged and undamaged Cuban planes that had survived the April 15 strikes, the very planes that should have been destroyed that morning had Kennedy not canceled the planned strike, were now flying overhead wreaking mayhem on the Brigade." Fucking KENNEDY.

"Meanwhile, the paratroopers dropped in. One set missed their target and lost most of their equipment, and two other men were injured when their static line cable broke. A portion of the equipment that was airdropped sank in the swamps."

This is my favorite thing ever: the official CIA.gov explanatio

n of the Bay of Pigs includes a quote from the Hamilton musical: "The invasion did not go as planned, and the exiles soon found themselves outgunned, outmanned, outnumbered and outplanned by Castro's troops." the musical came out in 2015 and was an instant smash, and this official CIA page was written a year later in 2016, so that wasn't an accident. Cheers to that CIA copywriter who snuck a quote from an activist Puerto Rican playwright into the official CIA explanation of a botched attack on a Latin American nation. That's some meta-level trolling.

After two days of occasional heroics and a few small successes punctuated by many more moments of sheer

bumbling ineptitude, the invasion was clearly devolving into chaos,, and Kennedy finally authorized 6 fighter jets to aid the remaining American B-26s and execute a final air strike, code named Mad Dog Flight. I'm conflicted about that name. It's badass but not in a triumphant way. Sounds chaotic and a recipe for disaster. "Drunken kitten flight." However, the operation was once again foiled when the American planes launched an hour late, apparently due to confusion over the change in time zones between Nicaragua and Cuba. So without assistance from jets, the attack was carried out by five of the B-26 bombers, and they were opposed by Cuban T-33 planes piloted by revolutionary armed forces

aka Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias or FAR. Those planes were officially known as F.A.R T-33s. Mmhm. Without any backup, two of the B-26s were promptly shot down. No casualties from the fart 33s. If you're an American pilot, that's an embarrassing way to go down. Death by F_A_R_T_33.

In the end, about 1200 of the American-trained invaders were captured by Castro's forces. Many were executed, but others were imprisoned and used as bargaining chips. Desperate for some type of win, the Kennedy administration was willing to strike a deal. Initially Castro offered to trade the prisoners for 500 farming tractors, like John Deeres, and then promptly

rescinded that offer in favor of 28 million dollars. I like this strategy, just bargain with yourself. It's like a reverse auction. Do I hear 100 dollars? Going once, going twice. No? ok how about 200 dollars? Going twice, I'm raising it to 300 dollars. Seems crazy but the final deal was 1,113 prisoners in exchange for 53 million dollars worth of food and medical aid. Che Guevara would actually send a personal note of thanks to Kennedy, stating, ""Thanks for Playa Girón. Before the invasion, the revolution was weak. Now it's stronger than ever." At the end of 1960, Kennedy authorized a full embargo of Cuban goods, which is why to this very day Americans can't legally purchase Cuban rum or cigars, which is a big

bummer if you're some kind of cigar-chomping robber-baron. Fat old white guys in suits are pretty steamed about this whole embargo situation. You can still grow a luxurious beard, however, there is no embargo on Fidel-beards. We haven't implemented a beard tax.

"There was...no doubt about who the victors were. Cuba's stature in the world soared to new heights, and Fidel's role as the adored and revered leader among ordinary Cuban people received a renewed boost. His popularity was greater than ever. In his own mind he had done what generations of Cubans had only fantasized about: he had taken on the United States and won."

In the wake of the Bay of Pigs disaster, Kennedy was super butthurt. I always think of Seinfeld in the sitcom being like: "NEWMAN." Kennedy was walking around the white house like, "CASTRO." He blamed pretty much everyone around him, at one point stating that he'd like to "splinter the CIA into a thousand pieces and scatter it to the winds." Now some of that saltiness makes sense.

Months after the failed invasion, Kennedy authorized the development of plans to assassinate Fidel Castro, and this was dubbed Operation Mongoose. I think that's the best one so far.

So just to get this out of the way, there's no

evidence that the CIA actually try to kill Fidel Castro with an exploding cigar. It was very likely one of the ideas that was tossed around, and you'll see claims to the contrary all over the Internet, but the fact is that an exploding device inside of a cigar wouldn't have been very practical. Especially in the 1960s. However, there's plenty of evidence that they did try to *poison* him via cigar. The CIA spiked a box of cigars with a botulism toxin and apparently were able to arrange to have it given to Castro via a trusted intermediary, except clearly the intermediary wasn't all that trusted, because the cigars disappeared and Castro didn't. I think my favorite bizarre assassination plan was an attempt to take

advantage of Castro's love of scuba diving. The idea was to plant painted clams or other mollusks in areas where he might find them, in irresistible vivid colors to catch his attention, and then when he hefted the large Mollusk to examine it, it would blow his face off. Another scuba related scheme was a plan to lace his diving suit with flesh eating bacteria. American lawyer James Donovan, who had been assisting with hostage negotiations, was tasked with delivering the suit. He didn't. No explanation why, but probably because that's a fucking terrible idea and he had a sense of self-preservation. Donovan wasn't a *complete* halfwit. He was only a quarter half wit, which is like an eighth wit.

In a scheme straight out of

spy novels, one former lover of Castro claimed that the CIA had convinced her to slip him poison pills. Supposedly Castro guessed her intentions and dared her to go through with it. "He leaned over, pulled out his .45, and handed it to me. He didn't even flinch. And he said, 'You can't kill me. Nobody can kill me.' And he kind of smiled and chewed on his cigar ... I felt deflated. He was so sure of me. He just grabbed me. We made love." I'm skeptical, but ok.

Equally James Bondish was the famous fountain pen scheme. The pen would be fitted with a hypodermic needle, and the killing dose would be administered by a turncoat high up in the Cuban

ranks. But when the CIA described the device, the official balked. He said, you're the CIA, can't you "come up with something more sophisticated than that?" I don't know what he wanted, maybe an exploding clam.

Aside from attempting to end his life, the CIA also became obsessed with the idea of humiliating Castro. They had a bunch of different schemes. For instance, to spray his office with hallucinogens or spike his food right before a speech, so that he would begin meandering and hopefully act crazy in public, undermining his authority. I feel like there's a pretty good chance he would've just canceled the damn speech...reading about these plans honestly makes me lose faith in our

government. Not that I had a lot to begin with. There were literally hundreds of plots proposed by the CIA, though most likely only a few were attempted, but my second favorite might be the idea of dusting his shoes with thallium salts, which would have made his hair fall out. They felt that much of his mystique was centralized in his beard. See? It's all about the beard.

Despite all of the laughably pathetic attempts to murder him, Castro lived a long cigar chomping, plantain eating, luxuriously bearded life. He died at the ripe old age of 90 in November 2016.

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