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Date: MAR 23 2000

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4 May 1961

After Action Report On OPERATION PLUTO

1. Preparation:

On 28 March 1961 the LCI's ELAGAR and BARBARA J. departed Stock Island, Key West, Florida for Puerto Cabezas, Nicaragua, arriving on 2 April 1961. The two case officers of the ships, Mr. William Robertson of the Barbara J. and Mr. Graydon Lynch of the Elagar and the two ships' captains Mr. Ryberg of the Elagar and Mr. Shane of the Barbara J., had been told that they were to lead and direct the landing phase of the coming invasion of Cuba which would be staged from Puerto Cabezas and all the details of the operation would be given us in Puerto Cabezas. Enroute we received a cable directing us upon arrival at Puerto Cabezas to assemble and test 36 small boats that were to be used in the coming operation. After arrival in Puerto Cabezas, the crews of the two ships carried out this mission completing it on 10 April. The briefing team from Washington arrived about 11 April and briefings were conducted on 12, 13, and 14 April. These briefings and the operations and administrative plans given us were clear and thorough. The Elagar was given the position of command ship and the mission of landing troops on both Blue and Green Beaches. The Barbara J. was to land troops on Red Beach and then patrol to the east to cover the landing areas.

2. Plan For Blue Beach:

The plan for Blue Beach called for landing two battalions, the

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ammunition, fighting in the water and under direct fire from tanks 500 yards away. He said he was destroying his equipment and heading for the woods. He then went off the air. At this time Headquarters was notified and the convoy reversed course as there was no need now for going in. One hour later a friendly PBY came from the direction of Blue Beach and passed us going S.W.

6. Rescue Operations:

On D plus 3 we received an order to take the UDT personnel left aboard the LCI's (3 on Elgar and 3 on Barbara J.) and transfer them to the destroyer Eaton which was escorting us. This transfer was made using rubber UDT boats in very rough seas. Mr. Lynch and Mr. Robertson also transferred with the teams to lead them on the operation. The information we had indicated that the survivors of the Houston were on the west side of the Bay of Cochinos and were still intact. The night of D plus 3 was spent cruising the inlets and small islands west of the Bay of Cochinos looking for the Castro patrol boat SV-3 which was reported captured by our people. No sign of this craft was found and at first light of D plus 4 we sailed into the Bay of Cochinos and up to the Houston. It was aground about 200 yards from shore and the decks were just above water. There was no sign of life and no trace of anyone ashore. We came out of the bay very close to the west shore and searched it with glasses but saw no one. We checked the lighthouse on the island of Cayo Piederas and found one of our 20 foot CEF boats drawn up on shore. We blew the ship's whistle repeatedly and went up and down both sides several times but found no sign of life. We then sailed to the west of the bay and started checking the keys that run off the swamps on the west side of the

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bay. On Cayo Blanco we spotted our first two survivors. The destroyer was about 800 yards from shore and the men ran out on the beach and started waving their shirts. We picked them up by sending the UDT team in to shore in the rubber boat using the 16 HP silent motor. We then spotted other survivors and spent all day picking up small groups in the same manner. The destroyer then put its whale boat in the water to assist. Although these boats were forbidden to actually land on the beach they could transfer the survivors from the rubber boat and take them back to the ship leaving the UDT to continue their search. One UDT team of three men were put ashore and combed the islands all day to find the ones who could not or would not come to the beach. Later in the day two Navy A.D.'s, propeller planes, were sent to us. They flew very low over the beaches and swamps and spotted several small groups. The UDT teams were then directed to these groups by radio and picked them up. The search was broken off at dark on D plus 4 and Mr. Lynch and three UDT men were transferred to the destroyer MURRAY which joined us that night. On D plus 5 the search was continued by both ships. The MURRAY was given the west side of the Bay of Cochinos down to the first islands and the ESTOR and the CONRAY which also joined us that night had everything to the west. At first light on D plus 5, Mr. Lynch and three UDT men landed four miles south of the Houston and started to search for survivors. The coast was searched all the way to the islands but none found. He then started to comb the same keys as the day before and picked up several more small groups. Due to physical exhaustion during this period,

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I cannot remember exact days. I believe we spent three or four days on this operation and were at one time or the other on four destroyers, one submarine and the aircraft carrier ESSEX twice. In all we picked up 26 survivors and found and buried one man on the beach. These survivors were in very bad condition and had been without food or water for five or six days. Most of them had only underwear or parts of uniforms left and some were naked. In all only two weapons were found among them, one pistol and one carbine. During this time three Castro helicopters were seen to the north of us flying very low over the swamps and were observed shooting the survivors by submachine guns from the air. They were seen to land on two occasions. One of these was a two place helicopter and the other two large Russian types painted green with no markings. On 24 and 25 April I conducted interviews with 19 of the survivors aboard the EATON. The following picture of events on the beaches came from these men:

A. Action At Red Beach:

The UDT team from the Barbara J. led by Mr. Robertson landed at about 0130 and placed the marker light on the right side of the beach but was fired on from shore when attempting to place the left marker. This fire was from small automatic weapons and was silenced by the fire of the UDT team firing M16's and submachine guns from the rubber boat. The first troops of the 2nd battalion started ashore in the small (19½ foot) boats of the Houston and the UDT team marked the left of the beach with a flashlight from 100 yards out in the rubber boat. The second wave received fire from shore while on

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## MR. ROBERTSON'S REPORT OF ACTIVITIES ON BARBARA J

The writer was Operations Officer on the Barbara J. The Barbara J is an LCI fitted with eight .50 cal machine guns, three .30 machine guns, a 75mm recoilless rifle, and a 57mm recoilless rifle, plus various automatic hand carried weapons. The job for the Barbara J during the operation was as follows:

1. The Barbara J was to escort the transport ship Houston into Bahia Cochinos to Red Beach. The Houston had aboard the 2nd and 5th Battalions Reinforced.
2. The Barbara J was to spot the Houston offshore, while the Barbara J's beach reconnaissance team reconnoitered the beach and set light markers at each flank of a suitable landing site.
3. The Barbara J was to provide gunfire support when necessary and assist in the unloading of the Houston's men and supplies at Red Beach.
4. When the beach was considered in good shape, the Barbara J was to escort the Houston out of Bahia Cochinos and proceed to patrol the beach from Green Beach eastward for five miles, engaging any enemy sea or road convoys heading toward Green Beach.
5. The Barbara J was to engage in any harassment operations which would confuse the enemy and help our own forces.

The objective of the 2nd Battalion on Red Beach was to secure the beachhead, proceed northward to Sapillar airstrip, link up with the paratroopers, and proceed to Objective A on the railroad at 62.0 - 72.0 on the 1:50,000 map. The objective of the 5th Battalion was to land behind the 2nd Battalion and take over and safeguard the beachhead.

At 2330 on D-1 the Barbara J and the Houston separated from the major convoy on schedule. At 0115 on D-Day the Barbara J and the Houston were on station opposite Red Beach. One Barbara J small boat with radio was dispatched to stand by with the Houston. The other small boat with the reconnaissance team and the writer proceeded ashore to the right of Red Beach and scouted and marked the right flank without being detected. Then the team proceeded by water to the point which was to be the left flank of Red Beach and discovered the point was occupied by enemy men. The 2nd Battalion commander was asked to notify us when he was within ten minutes of dispatching his first wave to the Beach. When the Battalion commander signified he was ready, the recon team approached the point. At about 30 yards off the point four or five machine guns and sub-machine guns opened fire on the recon boat. The recon boat returned fire and silenced these guns. The recon boat backed up to approximately 100 yards off the point and marked the left flank with a blinding flashlight towards sea. The first forty soldiers landed without opposition, though sporadic fire started as soon as they had landed ashore. This fire was their initial contact with the 50 militiamen in the village at the time of the landing.

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Cayao Miguel and Cayao Blanco del Sur and the island of Carrario. We carried loud speakers and searched in the mangrove swamps and tried to reassure hidden refugees that the arms we carried were not against them, but against Castro. They were afraid of our arms. For example, one man had been lying with only his face out of the water, and when he saw the writer, he tried to sink under water. We tried to assure him, but he thought that the writer was a Russian. He said that there were no friends any more, and we were Russians. We broadcast that if they would call to us, we would approach them without clothing and arms. During this operation Castro had helicopters calling as if they were they were saviers of the refugees and then submachine gun those who would show themselves. I believe that we missed many survivors because of the smallness of our patrol. We could not cover every square foot of these islands, and the refugees were afraid to expose themselves to us. All were in weakened condition and at times had to be carried to the boat.

On this night, the militiamen moved on to the islands and set fire to the brush and claimed to have driven out 166 survivors. I believe that this is an exaggeration. On the following morning, the writer and four UDT men and rubber boats and equipment boarded the submarine USS Threadfin and started towards Bahia Cochinos for an attempted rescue near the sunken Houston. This operation was cancelled at 7 o'clock in the evening and the Threadfin returned to sea

~~\_\_\_\_\_~~ The writer and men returned to the Eaton. The writer and the operations officer of the Blagar were air-lifted to the Essex and subsequently to Guantanamo and to headquarters.

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