

THE PLAYA GIRON BATTLE (Part II)

It is difficult to write about historic events when many of their main protagonists have already passed away or are not in conditions to give their testimonies on the past developments.

However, it is noticeable the number of comrades, who were so young during the Battle of Girón—and that continued to offer their valuable services later to the Revolutionary Armed Forces as soldiers or officers, in patriotic or internationalist missions--, and still remember and are able to describe with lucidity their participation in those actions, which was not included in notes, testimonies or books.

While looking for accurate information, I had to go through documents, memoirs, books; talk with several comrades who enriched by memories and even contributed details and facts of which I had not learned; but I was particularly sure about what I did or did not, about what I said and did not say.

This way, I will be introducing facts in this narration, which were not written on paper or any other document carefully being treasured at the Historic Affairs Office of the Council of State, where restless historian, Pedro Alvarez Tabío, compiled, registered, studied and preserved till he passed away on June 13, 2009.

As readers of the first part of this Reflection may recall, I explained about the measures adopted until 10:00 hours, April 17, after the landing. At that point the account of the instructions I was giving from Point One was interrupted, to continue with it at 13:02 hours—with the transcription of my phone call to comrade Raul, who was in the province of Oriente--, since I did not have the instructions given in those hours, and I was not even sure that they had been preserved.

The situation in the early hours of April 17 was too tense following the treacherous bombings against our air bases on April 15, and the landing on Girón (Bay of Pigs) 48 hours later.

I asked the Historic Affairs Office of the Council of State to make a special effort in the search of information about these three hours. Delving into hundreds of documents, colonel Suarez and his team managed to gather the data I needed about those hours, as well as pictures of handwritten documents, so they sent them to me. Thanks to this, I can include in the second part of this Reflection some references to this very important moment.

I start with the message given to Fernandez at the Australia sugar mill which, for the sake of saving time, I did not include in the first part of this Reflection.

“09:55 Hrs. Australia. Fernandez, we sank one of their ships and left another in flames, and we also blew one of their planes. Is the jet there? Aren’t they flying now? Yes. Just tell me. I will send you the jets...unless they went wrong, they must be flying around that area. I will guarantee you protection until you get hold of Palpite (settlement), this is very important. Then, I will be giving you air protection all the time you need over there. I will repeat, just in case the plane got it wrong. Ok.”

I repeat the one already released five minutes later to better understand what was going on at 10:00 hours:

“10:00 Hrs. To Curbelo. FAR. Curbelo: Fernandez has not reported. You have to explain the pilot that we are talking about the road that links the Australia sugar mill to Playa Larga, which is the place where the jets must give protection, though they do not have to fly to Playa Larga, but only to Palpite. Once one of them returns, the other will take off; you must explain that well: air protection to this. That’s right, more

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or less, for our troops that will be advancing in that direction. From Australia to Playa Larga, up to Cayo Ramona Key? What? Yes. OK, we must keep the protection of the road, which is important, and keep attacking the ships. And we must be on the alert all the time, because they will try to bug us right there tomorrow. You must keep the protection of the road all the time necessary. I let you know. Fine, that's ok."

Next there is a series of single pieces of information that evidently were not taken on shorthand. These are communications referring to data and issues that I will transcribe as I received them, without adding or suppressing any detail, making relevant observations, when they become confusing or lack sense. This period of time occurred between 10:05 and 12:35 hours, in which we use familiar and intelligible language.

"10:05 Hrs. Int. Curbelo to Del Valle informing that if US warplanes coming from Miami are given clearance, they may land in the airport of Guantanamo; Fidel informs that this must not be allowed to happen.

"10:05 Hrs. Int. Fidel to Quiko asking where the tanks in route to Matanzas are at this point.

"10:11 Hrs. Fidel interested in finding out if it is true they will land.

"10:12 Hrs. Curbelo reports to Fidel that our Sea Fury, which downed an enemy four-engine B-29, in Bay of Pigs. (it was unquestionably a B-26. At that point in time, we did not know very well the kind of aircraft being used by the enemy).

"10:14 Hrs. An American named Campbell interested in speaking with a top Cuban government official. He is informed that it is not possible.

"10:15 Hrs. Fidel interested in a radio set to listen to some news of interest.

"10:22 Hrs. Acevedo informs that the Combat Force from Cojimar is ready.

"10:23 Hrs. Commander Fidel orders combat columns and squads to head for Matanzas, to the Militia School in that zone.

"10:21 Hrs. Curbelo reports to Commander Fidel that they were considering at the base if war planes from Miami could fly over the territory. Commander Fidel said that they could fly along a normal route but not over our territory. Curbelo also informed that three ships were left out of combat, including one loaded with trucks and other things, and that a four-engine B-29 was also downed.

"10:40 Hrs. Commander Fidel orders to send another battery from Matanzas to Covadonga.

"10:45 Hrs. Commander Fidel orders the troop should keep advancing under the protection of the jet, and that a battalion should be sent to Soplillar and another to Australia.

"10:48 Hrs. The Armed Forces (FAR) inform that our Sea Fury downed two B-26 aircraft of the enemy.

The Battalion from Matanzas has occupied the fronts. Commander Fidel orders that prisoners should not be killed, but taken to Australia sugar mill. Try to have low traffic on the road. Our planes will give them protection. (This refers to the trucks transferring the combatants).

"10:57 Hrs. Commander Fidel orders that the jets should protect the forces advancing on Soplillar in route to the beach. (Soplillar is a settlement located southeast of the road that leads to the sea, through the forest.)

"11:18 Hrs. Commander Fidel tells Comandante Puertas to report to Comandante Olivera to return the

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bazooka company immediately. The howitzers must wait in Jaguey, the howitzers can go with Olivera. The tanks must stay there, the bazookas go with Fernandez, and Battalion 113 must be met wherever, and take the bazookas to Covadonga, Batteries 258 and 113 must go and take bazookas.

"11:25 Hrs. Commander Puerta orders a bazooka company, a bazooka company must urgently leave for Jovellanos.

"11:27 Hrs. Commander Fidel Castro orders Commander Puerta to revoke previous order and let the two of them go (howitzer companies) as fast as they can, while the other four plus the 120 one to reach Fernandez, the other with Filiberto.

"11:30 Hrs. Teruel calls Comander Fidel to report that the Company and Battery of cannons had gone in route to Covadonga, and a anti-aircraft Battery plus four howitzer batteries in Jovellanos, which will defend Jaguey, the armament, 85 Bat. with Fernandez.

"11:38 Hrs. Commander Fidel orders Commander Puerta that the 15-85 goes with Filiberto plus two Artillery batteries with Fernandez, as well as the 4th platoon, and if the 230th arrives, it will go with Fernandez to Jovellanos; the 180th and another one are going in that direction, as well as another four units will go later to Jaguey; Bat. 1st and 11th are going to Jaguey, the 6th, 19th, and 22nd are going to Matanzas.

"11:40 Hrs. FAR informs that as result of latest ops., they are protecting the advanced troops.

"11:48 Hrs. Order by Commander Fidel to Almeida requests news from Covadonga and indicates marching on Yaguaramas with mortars, anti-aircraft weapons and bazookas, while Filiberto heads for Covadonga with Bazooka Battalion, followed by a mortar company 185.

"11:51 Hrs. Commander Fidel informs Covadonga that a mortar and bazooka company is crossing Yaguaramas. And that Filiberto coming behind with more bazookas and mortars in order to reach the slope today.

"12:00 Hrs. Captain Hernandez (must be Fernández) informed Commander Fidel the need to order joining Olivera soon, anti-aircraft cannons arrived, which will be in movement during the night, they currently are in Palpite. They are fully protected by the airplanes, and they go for the cannons and tanks in the evening. In case of coming across any enemy they must open fire. At present there is a B-26 plane of the enemy over Australia." (The message is confusing, except for the idea that the artillery and tanks must wait till the evening).

"12:07 Hrs. FAR informs that a jet of the enemy is ready now. (Must be our jet and not of the enemy)

"12:11 Hrs. Reports to Commander Fidel read as follow:- he is in Palpite, Commander Fidel suggests to use the artillery at night and the mortars, and if it is possible to take the 120mm mortars to Soplillar and Palpite; at present they are not fighting, they are on the ships. (Perhaps this referred to the enemies). A parachutist, a wounded man that ran away. Positions towards Soplillar and the beach must be occupied. The jet is currently chasing a B-26 of the enemy; it is very important to take the positions in Palpite and take hold of the beach, the dead parachutist has an American name. (This is written in this confusing manner and the wrong and crazy idea of that hour was not considered again).

"12:20 Hrs. Commander Raul informed that counterrevolutionary groups are concentrating towards Oriente, Fidel told them to take precautionary measures.

"12:35 p.m.- To Puerta- Matanzas- Send message to mortars, which must reach Fernandez. Number 2 must be the first one, and you must send it to Fernandez. If it is not number 2, and it is another one, just send it to him anyway. Units 2, 9 and 13, any of them, send the one is there with Fernandez, rapidly. The other two, number 9 and 13, or whatever others, take them there. With number 15? For Covadonga.

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That's right, everything there. Listen, deploy the tanks around, hide them and wait for orders.

"12:37 p.m.- To Fernandez- Australia- What's new? Yes, the imperialist eagle. Good, what other news do we have? And are they advancing towards Soplillar too? Ok. Watch and be careful with any ambush. Good, very good! Listen to me; Did you get the anti-tank stuff? Ok, good. The mortar battery has already crossed Matanzas. I think it will be with you by 3 in the afternoon. Already? Two companies? With mortars, with mortars? Then, we need the 120 in case of resistance. Which? Ok, but you must be careful. As soon as the mortars arrive, you will deploy them aiming the beach and Soplillar; right there, since other batteries are on the way. Let's see if by daybreak we have already got hold of all that area. Ok, bye.

"12:42 p.m.- To Curbelo- FAR.- Follow them, see where they are going. Ok, but if when you get there, they are not. Just launch a bombing on Playa Giron. There are no enemies? It is clear? No men either? No trucks moving? Then, comb from Playa Larga, Cienfuegos to Giron, just everything that you can see. And keep protecting your advancement. Of course, wait for more reports, because it is going to be late. Keep protecting your advancement.

"12:45 p.m.- To Fernandez- Australia.- Has the backup arrived? What news do you have about the reinforcement? Haven't you asked them? Ok, fine. Where did that mortar hit? Where is Jucuma? Was at that site that the mortar hit? Are our people getting there? Sure? Fine. (They say those of Almeida have not arrived yet).

"12:47 p.m.- CURBELO-FAR.- So you sank it right there? And what happened then? Do you think they will re-ship them again here? They would not be able to leave, they would not make it? You will comb all from Playa Larga to Giron, anything that moves, and then on the road to Giron until near Cayo Ramona. You cannot allow them beyond Cayo Ramona. So then, take it from Playa Larga to Giron, and near Cayo Romana, everything that moves, and then you return. So, the ships are getting away? They are running away that much? Do you think they would land in other site or not? Do you think another shelling would be worth? Are you sure they are not US ships or sort of? Then hit them, after you comb the area. OK.

"12:55 p.m.- DORTICOS.- Listen, the ships are withdrawing. Well there are three sunken ships there, one is on fire and our people chasing them. I think so, did you get that? They have advanced towards the shore, and towards Soplillar. They were holding the place, but our troops are advancing towards that place. They advanced from Cayo Ramona key towards Covadonga, but they are losing their left flank. We will shoot at everything that moves now in that zone. Yes, a plane. But, it was expected that the ships withdrew, right? It was a hard beating. No, it was really strong. Their symptoms are quite bad. And how about our denunciation? Good. Propaganda, yes. Is Miro talking about a landing? Where? No, what point did they use to leave? Ok, fine.

"Osmany reports (13:00 p.m) that Pedrito Miret took 24 howitzers to Jovellanos, that he's got 24 howitzers ready and that they are preparing the 122 batteries." At this point, I stop the account of instructions I was giving about the continues combats in Giron to include the main parts of the conversation I had on 25 April 2011 with the former chief of the battalion with the Escuela de Responsables de Milicia (Militia School), retired colonel Nelson Gonzalez, a capable and well prepared comrade of that combat unit, who did not spare courage and commitment in that ferocious fight against the mercenary invasion organized by imperialism against our homeland.

"Commander.- Do you remember at what time they got to Palpite?

"Nelson González.- I estimate between 9:30 and 10:00 in the morning.

"Commander.- Can you recall what was it like in Palpite? I mean, what was that little town like?

"Nelson González.- The small town included four or six huts, thatch roofs, that set in fire after the shots,

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because in Palpite their shooting was scattered; that is, Palpite was not actually taken in combat, it was occupied.

“Commander.- Where did the shots, you talk about, come from?

“Nelson González.- They came from the surroundings, I could not determine that because it was too few shots.

“At that moment, all that was there could be a platoon at most, the first platoon with the first company.

“Commander.- And where was the rest?

“Nelson González.- The rest was with the column coming behind.

“We entered Palpite, we took hold of Palpite and we walked ahead.

“Commander.- But, how far are those huts you say?

“Nelson González.- Those small homes must be at some 25 or 30 meters from the road, very close to the road, Commander.

“Commander.- I see! And then, what did the troops did?

“Nelson González.- The tropas was coming behind, they began to get closer to the place, in an effort to get to the beach. It was well over 11:00 in the morning. Then, they opened close fire from their advanced troops, because they did have an advanced force.

“Commander.- I see! Do you remember at what time it happened?

“Nelson González.- It must have been before noon.

“Do you know why I tell you this? Because around 1:00 or 1:10 the planes came in

Commander.- And did you take any troops to Soplillar?

“Nelson González.- We sent a company, missing a platoon, with Lieutenant Roberto Conyedo Leon.

“Commander.- Who is alive.

“Nelson González.- Yes, he is alive.

“Commander.- Where does he live?

“Nelson González.- He lives in Havana.

“Commander.- Didn't you get his address?

“Nelson González.- I was not able to find out, but some comrades say he is not enjoying good health.

“Commander.- But, there must be someone else with the company. What company was that?

“Nelson González.- The second company. Rodrigo Rossié Rodríguez, a militia lieutenant from the first course, was the chief of the second platoon.

“Commander.- Rodrigo Rossié. Is he alive or dead?

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"Nelson González.- The last I heard about him is that he is alive and working at the ICRT (Cuban Institute of Television and Radio), since he is a specialist in communications.

"Commander.- But it is Conyedo who is in worse shape. How old is Conyedo?

"Nelson González.- He must be more or less my age, he must be about to turn 70 or 71.

"Commander.- Do you know anything about the other squad?

"Nelson González.- The leader of the other squad was Claudio Argüelles Camejo, who was the one who stayed in Pálpite. I already told you that one company, less one squad, was headed towards Soplillar; Claudio stayed in Pálpite and he was killed during the bombardment.

"Commander.- They killed him.

"They attacked Pálpite as well, at the same time?

"Nelson González.- Yes, they attacked by plane in the afternoon.

"Commander.- It was in the afternoon that they attacked the company?

"Nelson González.- That's when the planes came in, after 1:00 in the afternoon.

"Commander.- I see, they said it was during the afternoon, it happened at 1:00 p.m. It was the same plane that attacked you guys on the road.

"Nelson González.- Yes, it was the same plane, with machine guns and it dropped bombs and rockets.

"Commander.- But this plane must have left the road in order to go shoot at Soplillar.

"Nelson González.- Yes, but just a bit. It only veered off a bit, because before attacking Soplillar it attacked Boquerón.

"Commander.- You have told me about squad one, which is where Rodrigo Rossié Rodríguez was, and now you are talking about squad two, Claudio's squad, right?

"Nelson González.- Yes, Claudio's squad.

"Commander.- Claudio's squad.

And how many squads were there?

"Nelson González.- The third squad also headed to Soplillar.

"Commander.- How many men were with them?

"Nelson González.- Well, there was a company, but in the squad there must have been around 60 to 80 men in Soplillar and 25 to 30 men from this company must have stayed in Pálpite.

"Commander.- Correct. How far is Soplillar from Pálpite?

"Nelson González.- I estimate that Soplillar is around 5 to 6 km from Pálpite.

"Commander.- Correct. That is what I figured; I thought that Soplillar was a little further away from the

road.

"Nelson González.- Yes, yes. Soplillar is a good distance from the road.

"Commander.- About how far?

"Nelson González.- To get to Soplillar, you had to beat a trail in the bush to get to a small landing strip. I would say it was about 4, 5 or 6 km away from the road.

"Commander.- I see, that is what I thought.

And what house did you say was where they killed Claudio?

"Nelson González.- In Pálpite.

"Commander.- This as well all happened in Pálpite?

"Nelson González.- They killed Argüelles in Pálpite.

"Commander.- And those who were in Soplillar were from what squad?

"Nelson González.- From the second.

"Commander.- As well?

"Nelson González.- Yes, because the company they sent to Soplillar was the second company, less one squad.

"Commander.- Where did they kill the young man? ¿Claudio was from the second squad?

"Nelson González.- From the second squad of the second company.

"Commander.- Does someone have the list of names of those men?

"Nelson González.- The documents I sent you include the names of the battalion chief, the company chiefs and the squads.

"Commander.- You told me that in the battalion there were five companies?

"Nelson González.- Six companies and a 83 mm mortar battery.

"Commander.- When you made your advance towards Playa Larga, you said a 1:00 p.m., more or less, was it the whole group or did they send two companies? How was it?

"Nelson González.- Well, at the head were the first and third companies, behind them was the fourth company, and a little bit further behind was the sixth company, because the fifth company had stayed at the school. The fifth company joined in after 3:00 p.m., because what they left here in Matanzas was a squad to guard the garrison.

"Commander.- Correct.

"At that moment there were four of them there, the fifth stayed behind. And the sixth? There were six.

"Nelson González.- The sixth was a little bit more behind. Since we were in columns, that is to say in practically closed rank, we had no way of spreading out, we were very vulnerable.

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“Commander.- Do you remember the road towards the beach, after you cross the mouth of the lagoon and all of that, where the trees start, before reaching Pálpite?”

“Nelson González.- The thick trees begin after Pálpite, on the left, because on the right are weeds, some kind of prickly plant.

“Commander.- When the plane arrived, where was the first company?”

“Nelson González.- The first company was approximately 1 km from Pálpite.

“Commander.- So the ground was quite dense.

How many men were gathered there?

“Nelson González.- The men from the first and third were there, there must have been around 200 to 280 men.

“Commander.- But on the left and right side.

“Nelson González.- Yes, on the left and right side.

“Commander.- One kilometer away. And how far from the beach?”

“Nelson González.- I guess it was more or less 3 or 4 km, because if I remember correctly, from Pálpite to the beach it is about 6 km.

“Commander.- From those four shanty houses.

“I get it, more or less, that’s correct.

“And how far had the mercenaries advanced on the ground?”

“Nelson González.- The mercenaries held advanced positions. I estimate that it was not more than 500 meters from their main position that was at the entrance to the beach.

“That was at 1:00 p.m.

“Nelson González.- Yes, more or less at 1:00 p.m.

“Commander.- The mortar battery had already begun to fire, the 105s, I mean?”

“Nelson González.- No, not yet.

“Commander.- And the no-recoil cannon?”

“Nelson González.- The small one, the 75 mm.

“Commander.- Well, they had two types as far as I understand, I think they were the 57 and 75. I am trying to imagine what one can see from 4 km. They might have been 500 meters advanced in this area.

I wonder if you remember when the cannons with the 85 unit arrived at night, there was an argument with Fernández, who was behind Pálpite, where was that?

“Nelson González.- A little bit behind Pálpite, to the left.

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"Commander.- But on the ground or on the road?

"Nelson González.- On the ground, at the dog tooth limestone.

"Commander.- Do you remember when the 122 mm cannons arrived?

"Nelson González.- No, no I don't remember, because the 122 cannons came as it was getting dark.

"Commander.- Yes, at nightfall.

"Nelson González.- To the left there was a small field to move the antiaircraft artillery. I don't remember if there were four or six 85 mm cannons. And if I remember correctly, the head of the battery was Lieutenant Dow but I don't remember exactly his name.

"Commander.- Is he still alive?

"Nelson González.- I don't know.

"Commander.- When the cannons arrived, I guess that area was used.

"Nelson González.- I saw them, I'm not guessing, I actually saw them.

"Commander.- I know a comrade —I was talking with him just the other day— who is the brother of a lieutenant who was killed by the planes, at that time, during the first attack. He had some grenades...

"Nelson González.- That was Claudio Argüelles Camejo.

"Commander.- Exactly.

"Nelson González.- There are photos in the material I sent you.

"Commander.- Correct.

"So he was brought there because he was dead. Do you remember or have any idea of how many comrades were killed or injured in that area, when the airplanes attacked?

"Nelson González.- The planes must have started their attack between 1:00 p.m., 3:00 p.m. or 5:00 p.m., I think it was at 3:00 p.m.

"Commander.- Where is the information on the people killed and injured?

"Nelson González.- The list of the people who died is included in the material.

"Commander.- Correct. And do you remember the number of people who died?

"Nelson González.- Twenty-one people were killed and one died afterwards. In the material that I sent you, is a list of the 21 who fell in combat, I don't have the name of number 22, the person who died afterwards.

"Commander.- Correct.

"Nelson González.- I am very happy to answer all the questions you have.

"Commander.- Correct. Thank you.

"The leader of Column 1, Haroldo, is alive.

"Nelson González.- Haroldo had not arrived during the day.

"Commander.- No, that was at night, they all arrived at night; because I am thinking, I'm asking myself, why they made their advance at that time.

"Nelson González.- Well, Chief, it is only with the passing of time that I have found an answer to that question. It was completely and entirely due to enthusiasm, the drive to win and the extremely high moral values of those people. Afterwards, the mercenaries asked themselves how was it that the men in blue shirts and green berets fell and the rest continued to move forward.

"Commander.- I think that this is a legitimate explanation, really, because the idea of sending those people to advance at that time hadn't even crossed my mind because neither the tanks nor the antiaircraft artillery had arrived. It was a surprise. I understand now.

"Where were you able to retreat to after the attack?

"Nelson González.- To Pálpite again.

"Commander.- But where did the comrades hide, because the day is long?

"Nelson González.- In the surrounding areas of Pálpite, on the roads and in the borders of the ditches, there was no other place.

"Commander.- But they could have attacked you there again.

"Nelson González.- Yes, of course, they attacked us as well.

"Commander.- After that first attack, they attacked again?

"Nelson González.- No, I think that they flew over once and returned for a second time without recharging because they didn't have time to go to Nicaragua.

"Commander.- That's right, they had to go there to recharge and that took them hours.

"Nelson González.- They saved the ammunition in order to make several passes.

"Commander.- Yes, but they couldn't spend too much time going round and round.

"Nelson González.- They couldn't spend too much time in the air.

"Commander.- Do you remember when the first tanks arrived?

"Nelson González.- They also arrived at night.

"Commander.- Yes, because they couldn't come until night time, to avoid being attacked.

"Nelson González.- Of course, of course.

"Commander.- Nor the artillery, which came with the antiaircraft. I have the documents that list everything that was sent there. However, I realize now that when we attacked, we did so fully aware. Without any doubt, that was another occasion where we let ourselves get carried away by our enthusiasm; because, well, if you have tanks and antiaircraft artillery there is nothing else you can do,

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we had to attack.

“Nelson González.- It was boldly and very courageous.

“Commander.- Of course, but there were also tanks.

“Nelson González.- There were tanks and also the artillery and the mortar batteries were shooting.

“Commander.- Let’s talk a little bit about that.

Haroldo’s people had their instructions; to some degree, they were protected by tanks. The first tank was in the front, in the second tank was López Cuba, and I think that Haroldo was in the third. At least they were protected by something.

“Now, do you remember which of your companies advanced with them during the evening?

“Nelson González.- The first and third companies.

“Commander.- The first and third companies came back?

“Nelson González.- Yes, after the fall back to Pálpite, in the afternoon. In the evening they went back to attack. We had nearly 300 men there.

“Commander.- Did they move from the two sides or did they only advance from the left?

“Nelson González.- From both sides of the road.

“Commander.- On what side were Haroldo’s people?

“Nelson González.- The other day I read in an article that Haroldo’s people were the squad from the “Escuela de Responsables de Milicia” (Militia School), and as far as I remember Haroldo’s people were with us.

“Commander.- Of course, its natural that they would go first because they had the tanks, they had the artillery, they were a fresh troop. You were supposed to be there too because the Main Command Post did not know about how many casualties you had suffered. I remember that it was dark when we arrived; I think it was dark because I went to where some of our 120 mm mortar batteries were shooting and where the artillery, the 122 mm mortars, were placed, and I talked to Haroldo. It’s while I was there, that I received the written message that they were disembarking to the west of Havana —all that is written and signed—, the instructions I gave Fernández and Fernández’ response.

“They had already sent battalion 111 there, and one more, I think it was the 144. Haroldo had also arrived with a tank company.

“We had to cut off their retreat, especially after they had repelled our attack.

“It was suicide, right from the very beginning. One of our tanks arrived at the end of the road where the mercenaries had set up a tank, no-recoiling cannons, 105 mm mortars and 50-calibre machine guns that were sweeping the straight road, leaving no possibility of crossing.”

I will later return to this topic to discuss it with Nelson González, who is now a retired Colonel of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. González was the head of the Militia School battalion that had occupied the small town of Pálpite, at around 10:00 a.m. on April 17. He sent two companies less one squad to Sopllillar. In both these areas the enemy had deployed large and well-armed squads of paratroopers.

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Day 18

"08:30 hrs. To Ameijeiras. Don't take the mortars. Ask Osmany for the Militia Company. Send a shrewd guy to Soplillar to find out what's happening. Have them send the two remaining bazooka batteries at the INRA to Jovellanos. You set up yourself here (he points on a map)."

Testimony of Samuel Rodiles Planas, taken from the Trabajadores newspaper, April 19, 1999

"Fidel sent for Efigenio Ameijeiras and me. When we arrived at Punto Uno we saw a table with a map that was being analyzed by several comrades. They explained the mission to us. It consisted in first receiving the light combat company of

battalion 116 of the National Revolutionary Militia and the bazooka company of the INRA. Then we had to move to the Australia sugar mill and from there we had to keep moving until we had occupied the land between Cayo Ramona (by the peat bog) and the coast.

Fidel told us: 'You have to break into the enemy rearguard and create a state of complete instability, so when they try to send backups from Playa Girón to Playa Larga, they will find that they are being attacked from their rearguard.' He stressed this was a difficult mission and that we could end up in the middle of a siege, but that we could go secure in that they would give us all the support we needed.

"I was a boy in my late teens heavily influenced by the Soviet books Panfílov's Men and Volokolamsk Highway, which were very famous at the time, and I said to Fidel: 'Look, Commander, do not worry, the men of the National Police Force are going to be braver than Pafílov's. I remembered that Carlos Rafael Rodríguez burst into laughter when he heard me say that."

"08:45 hrs. Fidel orders Sergio del Valle to send the entire Special Column under the orders of Roger, except for the mortars and sappers, to Jovellanos. They must arrive around 4:00 or 5:00 p.m. He ordered them not to lose any men or trucks. They should await Fidel's orders.

"08:58 hrs. Australia. What? They are requesting more backup? Why are they requesting two more battalions when we already sent two battalions yesterday? Why? If they need backup, then send them the battalion stationed in Jagüey [...] Tell Fernández that the tanks must not attack from the same road they attacked from last night [...] he must try to drive the tanks across Soplillar and attack from the East, as if they were coming from Girón."

"Tell him to attack them with shells, tell him to start right away, tell him not to wait for the tanks, he must start crushing those people, tell him to hit them incessantly and not to wait for the tanks or anybody, [...] tell him to attack those people non-stop."

"09:22 hrs. To Aragonés. We are going to send Pedrito's mortars there.

"10:00 hrs. (Del Valle says that Augusto needs two hours to inspect the tanks and that this will delay the operation, he asks whether he can send them without inspecting them first). Tell him he has two hours. (These are the SAU 100 tanks and one or two more tanks from Lopez Cuba's company that were about to arrive).

"10:05 hrs. To Del Valle. Supply Pedrito with 2,500 highly-explosive bullets.

"10:12 hrs. To Pedrito Miret personally: I suggest that you take the twelve 122 guns and bombard the enemy not only over there, but also over Bermeja, Helechal, Cayo Ramona and this crossroad here (he points on a map). Part of your operation will consist of bombing this entire zone up to San Blas. I suggest that two antiaircraft companies support Pedrito. They must position themselves in Covadonga."

Pedro Miret Prieto's Testimony:

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"On the 18th I was ordered to move immediately with the rest of the group to the road that runs from the Covadonga Sugar Mill to San Blas to the east. Fidel told me to take as many projectiles as I can to bomb the enemy incessantly in that zone. [...] That same night we started bombarding the zone occupied by the enemy."

"10:20 hrs. To Del Valle. Send Pedrito another 4,000 mortar shells in addition to what he's got there."

"10:25 hrs. To Aragonés. I suggest you advance with the battalion stationed there along with four additional battalions; you must advance with the equivalent of a division.

"The other news I want to tell you is that you are going to advance with 15 tanks, including 10 Stalin tanks."

"You can initiate the attack with three battalions. I mean, with the battalion stationed there and two additional battalions that are going to be mobilized and sent there."

"10:35 hrs. To Del Valle. Ask if the vehicles have already departed and if they haven't, tell them to send them to Real Campiña instead of to Covadonga. Tell them to take the road to Colón, via Aguada.

"Give these two orders: tell Augusto to send the light battalion stationed in Jagüey to Yaguaramas, and send the 122 mm cannons that were delivered by the tractors to Covadonga early today; tell them to leave at noon, and to await orders from Pedrito Miret.

"10:38 hrs. To Del Valle. Tell Kike to send five motor vehicles with the ten tanks.

"11:10 hrs. To Osmany. Ameijeiras's troops must arrive to Soplillar at dawn; they are going from Jagüey to Soplillar.

"11:15 hrs. To Del Valle. Call Augusto and tell him to send one of the two antiaircraft batteries stationed at the Australia Sugar Mill. Tell him to send the quadruple one to Pedro Miret in Covadonga."

In his book on Playa Girón, Quintín Pino Machado depicts the events unfolding in the morning on April 18, 1961:

"At 10:30 a.m. Captain Fernández tells Commander Augusto that he has seized Playa Larga and was sending an urgent report to the Australia Sugar Mill. It read:

"Commander Augusto:

"1. The enemy has retreated from Playa Larga which is now occupied by our troops. The enemy is moving to Playa Girón.

"2. I'm moving antiaircraft artillery and campaign artillery to prepare an attack towards Girón.

"3. I expect the attack to unfold during daylight hours.

"4. There have not been air attacks by the enemy in this zone. It seems that some jets bombed our advanced troops around 10:15 a.m.

"5. Inform the Air Forces that Playa Larga is under our control."

The book also states: "the commander-in-chief was informed about this news via a call he received at 11:42 a.m. and it was reported that he was upset."

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I was really angry. Dividing the enemy troops in two not only meant that we would regain control of Playa Girón in less than 48 hours but, more importantly, it would leave the US-based command little time to recover from the political disaster they were about to suffer. It also meant that we could spare 80% of the fatalities and injuries.

I recalled how during our war in the Sierra Maestra Mountains, only four years earlier, with just 30 semi-experienced combatants we could ambush and attack elite troops of Batista's dictatorship. In a wooded setting, a force of one or two squads could take apart an entire column of 200 or 300 men. The enemy forces in Playa Larga could be taken quickly, even by leaving Palpite by foot following a path and ambushing from behind with automatic weapons and antitank equipment. This would have prevented the enemy from gathering their forces and resources in Playa Girón. I knew of a road where tanks could circulate and arrive within a matter of 15 minutes and a company could walk in the shade of the woods and arrive in one hour.

Those were my plans when I received the news (at around 11:30 p.m., the evening of the 17th) that forced me to go to Punto Uno in the capital, so I gave instructions to Commander Augusto Martínez to pass on to Fernández.

An artillery force consisting of twenty-four howitzers, six 120 mm mortars, six 85 mm cannons and numerous antiaircraft batteries was more than enough to wipe the mercenary forces in Playa Larga from the map.

I wrote a short note to Fernández and signed it at 3:00 a.m. on the day of the 18th and rushed off to the capital. In those days, there was no six-lane highway, which today allows you to reach the proximities of the Australia Sugar Mill in an hour and half. We had to drive across the city of Matanzas and take the Vía Blanca highway. I arrived in the capital around 6:00 a.m. I won't say how angry I was when I learned that the landing had not taken place. It was perhaps the only thing that went well for the government of the United States in that adventurous war, as I pointed out in the first part of these Reflections.

Without pausing to take a break, I went to Punto Uno and started working again at 8:30 a.m. Only three hours later I received the news that the enemy had retreated without suffering any casualties and was able to reunite their troops and weapons in Girón. I convinced myself one more time that the enemy would fight their main battle in Girón and that their reserves of mercenaries were exhausted. They would desperately try to fight their way out.

"11:42 hrs. To Augusto. Australia. It's a shame that those troops had retreated to Playa Girón, what a shame! What negligence that nobody had sent even one company to cut off their retreat, you should have had a company stationed on the road! After leaving Soplillar, we must have already reached the shore by now. What time did you give it to him? I mean, do you know how easy it would have been to station a company on the coast and then cut off their retreat; if not, they will continue to resist. "

"Ok, now you are going to tell Fernández from me [...] that he has to advance! Tell him to do exactly what he was told. Let me talk to Julio (Flavio Bravo's war name): why didn't you cut off the retreat of those people? Look Julio, you should have sent a company there to cut off their retreat. I sent the order to locate some infantry troops and cut their retreat off. Why didn't you do something so simple as that? You weren't supposed to let them go! The least you could have done was to pursue them with the tanks! With the six tanks you have there..."

"Look Julio, you tell the people that I said to grab the tanks or whatever they can get their hands on and go after them. And, they are not pursuing the enemy? Tell me if you people have a pact of non-violence with the mercenaries!"

"To Del Valle: Tell Curbelo the enemy is pulling out of Playa Larga and heading to Playa Girón; tell him to go after them and punish them, and to keep us posted on his situation."

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"To Julio. I'm going to send the air forces since you let them go instead of going after them. What concept of war do you have? What are you doing with all those guns and all those tanks!

"What a shame Julio, you have to order your troops to chase after those people immediately. I'm going to order to send the planes to go after them. We have enough anti-aircraft to do anything! And tell the tanks stationed there to advance! Let's see how well they can pursue them to Girón, because there could be a ship waiting to pick them up and they could take the tanks and everything. An enemy on the run cannot put up a resistance.

Attack them with the tanks. If you did that, that would be great. But the mercenaries are going to get away from you. Don't forget what I'm telling you. The mercenaries are going to get away! But just do it, for heaven's sake, and see if you can do it during the daylight hours, the tanks move better in daylight! [...] Tell the tanks not to do any more repairs or any other crap, tell them to join the others and pursue the enemy. Send the mortars and the anti-aircraft gear in right after. Let's go with last night's plan since they are retreating."

I ask the readers to please excuse me if I use inappropriate words. But if I don't include them, I will be betraying the truth of the facts I'm recounting.

In addition, I did not only send Column 1 under the orders of Haroldo Ferrer, who had joined our rebel army in the proximities of Chivirico in mid 1957, as Almeida narrated in his book *Por las faldas del Turquino*. Nestor López went with him with a force of 15 tanks and armored vehicles, heavy mortars, twenty-four 122 mm howitzers and the bazooka company headed by Roger García Sánchez. Their mission was to regain control of Girón. Those brave soldiers were not experts handling their artillery, but they knew just enough to pulverize the mercenary forces. I know there were some disparaging remarks made regarding the training of the artillery troops. If people had known about our lack of skills in terms of handling mortars and bazookas—not to mention howitzers and tanks—when we fought in the Sierra Maestra, nobody would have made a disparaging remark regarding the skills of those men who amply demonstrated in the Battle of Giron what they were capable of with those weapons.

Many years later, I learned and confirmed several facts that I didn't have the chance to correctly check after that fortunate, though costly, victory. In some aspects the historic version didn't rigorously match the facts.

I will continue with my narration based on irrefutable historic documents, and sometimes, on the accounts given by people who played important roles in the events. For my part, I have always told exactly what I knew and could not forget.

"12:00 hrs. Kike (Rebel Army Captain Enrique González). Send the large company in. Send the small one first, and then the large one, tell them to go in their own vehicles. How many of them are they? Ten?

"But we want to send another half company. I didn't tell you before because I thought we were not going to be able to get handcars, but we got trains. Take them on the handcar to Yaguaramas via Colón-Aguada-Real Campiña. Station them there, this is very important. Do you think you can take them all in the handcars? Is that possible? Well, take them by handcar then. Let's see if we can get ten handcars. It is importance that you advance tomorrow.

"Everything is going well, those bastards are retreating but they will be able to leave if we continue messing around. Tell Roger to take his column and go to the Australia Sugar Mill and to wait there for orders from comrade Aldo Margolles who will go with them to accomplish a special mission. If they can get there tonight, that would be perfect. In Yaguaramas? If that is true, then that is great news. Yes, a great load of cannons, yes. Well, assign them to Pedro García; we should send a truck with 122 mm howitzers, at least four or five thousand.

"12:05 hrs. Tell the battery situated in Puentes Grandes, to send the veteran battery to the Covadonga

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Sugar Mill under the orders of Pedrito Miret, and the other to Oriente with Raul.

"12:07 hrs. To Curbelo. I need you to see what the position of the mercenaries is. Tell us where these bastards are and attack them with everything you've got. They are going to try to get on the ships and that will be worst than if they stay and form a beachhead. Well, it seems they are going to board the ships, they are retreating!

"12:10 hrs. To Augusto. Australia. Tell Fernández... to take the tanks and whatever else and to go after those men, because they are going to get away."

"Send an urgent order to Fernández, by motorcycle, to begin the pursuit of those people with the armored vehicles he has there. Tell him to send the tanks afterwards, but that they have to send an advance tank brigade to know where those people head to. Those people are retreating, they are demoralized, and we have to pursue them. What an embarrassment to have a damned defeated enemy about to get away! Do you hear me? They are going to get away Augusto! We have to take Girón! [...] I sent the FAR to go after them and I plan to go after them all the way down the road.

"12:13 hrs. To Aldo Margolles (captain of the Rebel Army). You have to advance as much as you can during the night. You must make an extraordinary effort to try to get to that position by morning. Look for all the possible ways to try to get there by vehicle. They will have nowhere to escape.

"12:15 hrs. To Osmany. Using helicopters, could we place a company of men there tonight? Call the Baracoa base and find how many helicopters and pilots are available!

"12:17 hrs. Aldo Margolles. Send to mobilize a good battalion chief. Send him by truck. We're going to station him in Yaguaramas, we're going to send the helicopters to the coast. The mercenaries are going to think those are their helicopters, we are going to cut off their retreat that way.

"12:24 hrs. To Curbelo. FAR. They will search the road from Playa Larga to Girón,

check it thoroughly. It is vital that they inform us of where they locate them. Listen,

get all the planes ready, we are going to attack tonight with a series of night

operations. Have everything available ready, all the bombs and all the military

supplies.

Tell the people that they have to take out the remainder in the next twenty-four hours, just like us. Now, after this, tell me the results of everything, and tonight we will take out the rest. We have to get to the last of those guys!

"12:25 hrs. To Kike. How many of those big things have you got mounted? Can they leave immediately? How many hours can you guarantee it will take them to Yaguaramas? Well, tell the people, please hurry up, because those other people are retreating, and it is most important, and I know it will take more than five hours, if you take eight I will be satisfied. The sad thing is that those bastards are trying to retreat. Be there as soon as possible, boot up.

"12:26 hrs. Augusto. Australia. Hey, Augusto, those rats are starting to go! Already? What about the tanks, where are they? The others are coming. Send another message to Fernández, tell him, from me, that I think the enemy is retreating in general, completely demoralized, now is the time to tear them apart, without respite, we must try to take Girón, if we don't they'll go. Tell him, he's to pursue them by day, relentlessly and he must break the tank they have. Tell him there are signs that they're retreating demoralized, that it's the psychological moment to chase them, relentlessly, tell him I know it's the psychological moment to chase them back. Send this to him with another rider, urgently; we must try to take Girón at all costs, this afternoon, with tanks in formation and mortars behind, the mortars and the howitzers. Take advantage of the eight tanks that we can put into action, and chase them without a

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rest, Girón must be taken this afternoon, make a supreme effort.

"Listen, Augusto, it's very important that Fernández and Julio know the enemy is retreating demoralized, there are signs of withdrawal at other points, that it's the time to pounce, without respite, that the eight tanks advance, they can't handle that, destroy the tank they have and take Girón, we are going to order a series of operations and advance at other points, the moment is now, mark you! Send him a rider at speed. "

Another battle began for me, to persuade my comrades who advanced from Playa Larga, the enemy would not attempt to land new forces, but to try to re-embark.

"12:35 hrs. To Del Valle. We're going to put this light combat company in Yaguaramas (Light Combat 122, commanded by Lieutenant Debien), at full speed, to cut off their escape.

"12:37 hrs. Baracoa. Are there five men that know how to handle the big things, there are five that know? Send out urgently to locate the three pilots, who were stationed there, they will receive instructions, there in Baracoa. I'm going to send a man. Yes, they can stay there with the helicopters ready to set off urgently.

"12:42 hrs. To Del Valle. Send a man to Baracoa, or tell him to tell Baracoa that as soon as the pilots are there, they should come here. The light combat unit from Yaguaramas and the chief here, and the pilots of helicopters here. Call the FAR, to put a tank with helicopter gas in Yaguaramas.

"12:45 hrs. To Almeida. Las Villas. What news from there, from your side? Where? Caleta de Cocodrilo? He's there? Tell him to take position there. And do you have resistance in front? Tell him to take positions there, we're going to make a move, but do not pass there. [...] René in Cocodrilos? But Matey and Cocodrilos are on the coast? But where did Rene go? [...] Where did he go, to Juraguá? But Pupo is on the coast, moving towards Girón. Advancing towards Girón without adversaries? Well, what interests me is that the coast east of Girón is taken, it is very important, because they're going to flee there, they will flee and will fall into the hands of those who move along the coast. If possible send a man, even if it's on horseback, to tell Pupo to progress through the night as much as possible to Giron, and send another battalion behind. I had troops ready to send there by helicopter, but as things are, I don't think it's necessary. Send this battalion behind Pupo, I plan to use the airborne force in any case, [...] They are in retreat. We think we'll take Playa Giron tonight. San Blas Key? Well, we're going to destroy the enemy in San Blas tonight; we're going to fire twenty-four howitzers. [...] you must send a message, by horse or whatever, that Pupo advances by night to Girón and establishes in a position 4 kilometers away, no more. There are 1500, according to reports. A prisoner? They sent all those they had ... Everything is going wonderfully well, but we will pretend we do not know, until tomorrow.

"13:00 hrs. To Del Valle. The Airborne is going to perform a bold operation, leaving Yaguaramas, we will station it between Cayo Ramona and Giron, on the same road.

"13:01 hrs. To Omar (Rebel Army Commander Omar Iser Mojena): Grab four bazooka shooters with four assistants with plenty of ammunition, at least a dozen shells each. We will do an airborne operation, and you will be located within enemy lines, against a retreating enemy, and ordered to cut it in half. We're going to locate a company in the middle of two points. We're going to be located within enemy lines. These bazooka men can go by helicopter. Let's give the helicopter air cover. Order six bazooka shooters with their aides to prepare, and tell them to go to the airfield in Baracoa.

"To Curbelo. Tell me, what goes there? "Two Sea Furies, two jets and how many B-26s? "With four 500-pound bombs? "Everyone there? The Sea Furies are already doing sweeps? Well! It's a success. Look, Curbelo, the importance of this road, especially if they are located, if the tank that tries to retreat is located, and destroy Giron; when it appears that calm is re-established and they begin to cook the soup [...] for the night, we are not going to do anything? Why? Ah, but it's easy to find them, but at night, when there are lights, it's easy to find the point. [...] It would be worth the effort, because that night is worth much, because they are defeated already and we must chase them now more than ever, to finally defeat them. [...] With messages such as tonight, I think we will avenge the comrades who fell there. Hey, tribute must be paid to the pilots, a public tribute because they were the heroes of the day!

"13:10 hrs. To Almeida. Sure, but don't take Girón. Well, prepare to capture it, the tanks are going there. Hey, Almeida, confirm that order, if you can get a horse, mule, jeep or anything there. And the other thing is this: tonight the artillery will also work from the side and if they have not retreated from San Blas, they will fall on them from above like no one has ever fallen in such a short time with five

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thousand cannon shells. We're going to bombard Bermeja, Cayo Ramona, Ferny, and all that with 122mm guns, and will prepare a tank unit to move forward in that direction, Keep that secret! Who? But Pupo is more than a thousand miles from where the shells will fall, if Pupo takes a shot it's avoiding the tanks of Playa Larga.

"What? ", "an American and three Cubans? When? Now? A canon from the 57 and another from the 85, anti-tank, Who? "René was to break the line between San Blas and Caleta de Cocodrilo? Yes, but he has not taken anything yet, nor has he taken San Blas. Tell him to watch out for the enemy in case they withdraw, but hopefully they won't withdraw, because we are going to surround them and cut off the retreat to Girón.

"13:27 hrs. To Augusto. Why do you know is advancing? How fast? Another prisoner? Who is it, what does he say? More or less the same. How many ships are sunk? And this prisoner, how did he appear? Glad you are there, behind the people! Send Fernandez another rider, tell him that the enemy is defeated, that he should pursue them with the greatest tenacity, say it's a defeat, that he should chase them, this is the psychological moment; say it again, he should pursue them relentlessly. Tell him Pupo is 2 kms from Bay of Pigs, in the east, so to hurry up, or Pupo will take Playa Girón, they're completely cornered. Hurry up, at full speed, go there with the tanks, they haven't got a good chance now. Hey, I didn't know it was 1:30 and Fernández is advancing?... The prisoners?, send them all over here. Cars? But do you think you can fit the prisoners you are going to get tomorrow, today and tomorrow in cars? Fit them in other cars! I have an idea. You can send two of those prisoners ahead with a promise: that all those who turn themselves in will have their life respected. I tell you, truly, that we could catch almost all of them by sending two prisoners there.

"13:35 hrs. To Del Valle. I think we should announce to the people that I will speak to them tomorrow. I'll be on television with forty prisoners, and say 'these guys have my word. "

"13:49 hours. To Ameijeiras. You have to hurry as much as possible, the tanks could get to Playa Giron today.

"13:51 hours. To Gonzalo (Chele). Covadonga. What news? Who is in San Blas, the enemy? Are they arriving in San Blas? Since yesterday they've been arriving in San Blas. That's the most difficult point to pass, San Blas? The weapons they have been using won't fit in a truck? Where, from Covadonga to San Blas? So San Blas fell? But, how haven't they fallen, if they've lost so many weapons! Then they're screwed, and lost that position.

"13:54 hours. To Efigenio. Your operation is always the same, because the possibility exists that people are there. It might be good to occupy all the villages and hamlets between Soplillar and the point Margolles will come out.

"13:56 hours. Augusto. Australia. Is there any news? Yes. Who? But aren't they attacking Playa Giron, damn? But with what is Pupo going to attack Playa Giron? Is Fernandez advancing? Look, if with eight tanks Fernández doesn't take Playa Girón before six in the evening ... because with eight tanks and artillery that these tanks have, and everything else, if he doesn't take it, he should withdraw. Write it, and send it with a rider: if with eight tanks, twenty-four howitzers, a mortar battery and five thousand men behind him, he can't take Girón before six o'clock in the afternoon, he will play the fool in front an enemy on the run. Who is the boss of them all? Is Frank coming? Doesn't he know who's boss? Nine B-26 aircraft from Nicaragua, ten P-54s: Monday, 2:00 a.m. five American ships from Land Garcia; a mother ship from the U.S. Navy brought tanks and landing craft; the ships left Puerto Cabezas. The individual, is he quiet, or nervous? A warship, the same one that bombed the Texaco. They trained on the island of Diéguez, Puerto Rico. And, didn't we sink it? With a team of frogmen who they placed two hours before in the channel through which they had to pass, that two U.S. Navy destroyers, one with the number 507, entered two or less miles from the coast, with the lights off. The plan they had, with five hundred disembarked at Baracoa, Oriente. A simulated landing in front of Pinar del Rio, the Air Force acted two or three days before the landing, bombing our military objectives. They say they just bombed three aircraft.

"Hey, why doesn't the Gallego just grab all those people? Ray is in disagreement with the Council because he wants to keep the militia, and the Council does not want that. That political illiterate, where did he come from, is he Cuban? From Santa Clara?, " Son of a crazy or what? What does this worm do?

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Impresario..., Father Cabelo, a Jesuit; who else? Simulated a landing in Pinar del Río. Can't you send them to gain time? Fine, send them with a good guard, right here, to Point One "

Translation of intercepted messages to the enemy:

"13:02 hrs. Reported by FAR: First message: "Under continuous air attack, we need air support. The communication boat GFDLYD93 sunk." Second message: 'Acronyms 0940 WK170461, under desperate fire, need air support. Two ships sunk. Now, more air support. " The initials of the first message: WX1181461.

Testimony of Haroldo Ferrer Martínez

"At dawn on the 18th we occupied Playa Larga amidst some confusion, because in the darkness we mixed with the mercenaries, who were still in their positions. The enemy retreated in trucks and other means.

"Then they ordered us to withdraw and regroup the forces, the wounded and those who continued to Colon had not make contact with us. I tried to regroup the column but it was more difficult on foot. Then they gave me the order to move to the reserve and we relieved the PNR battalion which was a fresh unit. "

Testimony of

Victor Dreke Cruz

"On the 18th we were ordered to advance, we reached the Covadonga sugar mill where we settled in and closed the entrance to that area because at dawn on the 19th there was going to be a heavy artillery shelling and at the end of that, we would move forward with tanks , infantry and artillery.

"The Commander in Chief arrived in Covadonga in the afternoon and gave the order to take Girón, so at 18:00 hrs on the 19th we were supposed to be at the waters of the beach. The chiefs who led the offensive in this sector were commanders Rene de los Santos, Filiberto Olivera, Raul Menendez Tomashevich, Victor Bordon Machado, Evelio Saborit and captain Emilio Aragones. "

Testimony of Orlando Pupo Pena

"At dawn on April 18th I ordered the advance of a scouting party, we unloaded the militia from the trucks and started walking forward. We located some farmers to show us the way, because we did not know the territory ... "

"I remembered that the specific mission ordered by the Commander in Chief and forwarded by the Gallego Angelito was 'Pupo, take this battalion, follow the coast to Playa Giron, to meet the mercenaries, worry them, you do not have to take Girón, you have to put up resistance so they cannot move over here'. "

"... and the rest of the battalion followed behind because there was no room. The strength of the vanguard were these two groups of combatants. We advanced and three comrades were injured, one had a large wound on his back and the other two later died in hospital in Cienfuegos. One named Captetillo died and Arce was wounded. We reached some rocky mounds where it seemed some work had been started.

"... at that moment three bazookas arrived, with their three shooters, sent by the Commander in Chief in a helicopter. They were three comrades from the INRA Bazooka company: José Bechara Rodriguez, Luis Céspedes Batista and Sergio Alvarez Matense."

At 21:00 hours Captain Fernandez wrote a note to commander Augusto Martinez where he reported on the situation in his front, according to Quintin Pino Machado in his book:

"Commander Augusto:

"1. We are thinking of advancing to make contact with the enemy in Girón. We think we can extend our lines to about 2-3 km from Girón.

"2. We are putting in place the 122 mm, also mortars. Please send me two more batteries of 120 mm mortars now, so we can use them, with all that we will fire on the enemy during the night.

"3. We attack at dawn with artillery, infantry, tanks and advance with the infantry on Girón.

"4. Given the experience we are thinking of the need for a crane to remove damaged tanks. Urgent.

Request tanks mats at Managua. Fernandez "

That is all the information I receive from Fernandez on April 18 from 10:30 am. It had been more than 10 hours without the Central Command Post receiving any news of what happened in the Girón Playa Larga area. From Haroldo and López Cuba, heads of Column 1 and the tanks and armor which attacked Playa Larga, we had not received any news that day.

Those hours were spent organizing the revolutionary forces that attacked the invaders from the north

THE PLAYA GIRON BATTLE (Part II)

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and northeast of Girón.
To be resumed shortly.

Fidel Castro Ruz
May 25, 2011
2 .25 p.m.

Date:

25/05/2011

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