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Juan Carlos Rodríguez, *The Inevitable Battle: From the Bay of Pigs to Playa Girón* (Atlanta, GA: Pathfinder Press, 2009), pp. xvi+359, \$20.00, pb.

The Inevitable Battle is one of several books published ahead of the 50th anniversary of the Bay of Pigs debacle. Originally released in Spanish by a Cuban publisher, this seamless translation into English is a readable first-hand account of a defining Cold War episode. As the title suggests, one of its main arguments is that Washington was destined to mount a military offensive against Cuba once its island neighbour adopted a political path contrary to US wishes. Another is that the preparedness and determination of the Cuban authorities and military forces defeated the invasion, rather than any botched strategy on the part of the operation's US planners.

Unlike its recently published counterparts, this book adopts a fundamentally Cuban perspective towards the events of April 1961. In addition to limited secondary material, it relies on the author's own first-hand experience as a literacy teacher in the neighbouring Escambray Mountains, as well as the testimonies of Cubans directly involved in repelling the CIA-sponsored military invasion. The inclusion of such evidence from Cuban protagonists is refreshing, but dates for most of their testimonies are absent, leaving the reader unsure as to how contemporaneous to real events are their first-hand accounts.

A tendency towards hagiography is evident in the preface by José Ramón Fernández, an important military figure from the campaign and the author of an earlier book on the same topic. He asserts as a fact that Cuba's population was in 'full agreement with Fidel's political ideas' in 1961 (p. xii). While it is true that the Kennedy administration in the United States wildly overestimated the strength of internal opposition to Castro's regime within Cuba, and the operation depended on such support in order to succeed, such an overarching statement provokes scepticism. What is certain is that the Bay of Pigs was one of Castro's and revolutionary

Cuba's finest hours.

Rodríguez himself only occasionally strays towards such concrete positions in support of Castro and the Revolution. The strengths of his book lie in its description and analysis of the Cuban authorities' anticipation and preparedness for the invasion. The tense atmosphere in the island leading up to the invasion is brought out, for example, in the very personal accounts of peasants and literacy teachers in the Escambray Mountains, victims of a counter-revolutionary insurgency supported by Washington. Castro had declared 1961 the 'Year of Education', and agents under CIA instructions had already instigated sabotage operations against his regime. For example, the author includes testimony of the capture, torture and killing of a literacy teacher, providing background for the wider narrative on the invasion itself. Such detail provides a new outlook. The Bay of Pigs is remembered more outside Cuba as a humiliating episode for Kennedy's new administration and as an abject defeat for Cuban exiles and mercenaries on the island's southern coast, but this book reminds us that many civilians were tragically caught up in this ill-conceived adventure.

The book also details how agents and underground opposition targeted bomb attacks against commercial and industrial enterprises on the island. A particular source of anger was evidently the destruction through fire of the Encanto department store in Havana. According to Rodríguez, the proliferation of such attacks against the Revolution and Cuban citizens explains the authorities' tactical detention of thousands of counter-revolutionary suspects ahead of the invasion. Related to this, Rodríguez refutes the allegation that Cuban state security had penetrated the CIA operation in Guatemala, where Cuban exiles and mercenaries received preparatory training before the launch of their infamous military invasion (p. 159). As for the battle itself, the book paints a vivid picture of the participation by Cuban militias and the regime's air force, the former transported to the battlefield in buses and attacked from the air by B-26 bombers. The decisive intervention of Cuban pilots is also described in sharp detail. Despite the pre-emptive bombing of Cuban airfields, sufficient numbers of planes were deployed to the battlefield following orders from Castro, and these dealt a *coup de grâce* to the invading force by sinking or incapacitating its main supply ships.

Away from the scene of the physical battle, Rodríguez highlights the difficulties faced by the United States in the forum of the United Nations, where the US representative suffered embarrassment due to a lack of information from his own government. Meanwhile, the declarations of Cuba's foreign minister are portrayed as a more faithful depiction of what was really occurring at the scene of battle in the Caribbean.

Common to Cuban publications, the book lacks an index; furthermore, its footnotes are infrequent and lack detail. It does, however, contain an ample and pertinent selection of photographs from the ill-fated invasion. This volume is not therefore based on multi-archival research from both sides of the Florida Straits, but neither are many of its rival publications. This points to the difficulty of researching twentieth-century and especially post-1959 Cuban history: foreign scholars are largely restricted from working in Cuban government archives, while historians based on the island have limited access to non-Cuban sources. Such limitations often add to the existing language barriers for non-Spanish-speaking and non-English-speaking researchers. These barriers to scholarly research still exist, 50 years after this early calamity for Kennedy's foreign policy and early triumph for the Revolution. In this David and Goliath confrontation of the Cold War, *The Inevitable Battle* recounts the battle from David's point of view, a story largely untold by other histories of the Bay of Pigs.

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