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60 Years Since  
The Bay Of Pigs  
Invasion

Remembering  
Alabama's  
CIA Heroes







# BAY OF PIGS - 60 YEARS AGO

## Remembering Alabama's CIA Heroes

In January 1961, with tensions rising between the new U.S. administration and Fidel Castro's two-year old, increasingly harsh, authoritarian regime, the United States severed diplomatic relations with Cuba.

Soon thereafter, the CIA asked Major General Reid Doster, then serving as commander of Alabama's Air National Guard, to head up a new effort to recruit pilots, maintenance people, and aircraft armaments specialists with experience on the World War II-era B-26 medium-range bomber. Recruits, apparently, were told that they would be participating in a secret mission aimed at toppling the Castro regime. General Doster enthusiastically accepted the assignment.

### *The AANG CIA Contract Recruits:*

Four of General Doster's early recruits that became CIA contract pilots were:

**Pete Ray**, a 30-year old pilot in the Alabama Air National Guard, was married with two children. He was a technical inspector at Hayes Aircraft Corporation, which repaired and modified planes for the USAF in Birmingham, AL.

**Leo Baker**, Pete's co-pilot, was a native of Boston and a former flight engineer at Hayes Aircraft Corporation. At the time he was recruited, Leo was managing two pizza parlors in the Birmingham area.

**Riley Shamburger**, a former USAF Major, was an experienced pilot and instructor in the Alabama Air National Guard, and a test pilot for Hayes. He was 36 years old, married, and the father of two children.

**Wade Gray**, Riley's co-pilot, was a former USAF radio and electronics technician and a member of the Alabama National Guard. He also worked for Hayes.

Although the men were told virtually nothing about the specifics of this dangerous mission, they signed on as contract employees with the Agency's Directorate of Plans. They were four of about 100 Alabama guardsmen who volunteered for what was certain to be a highly risky endeavor.

### *Their Final Mission:*

On April 19, 1961, sometime after midnight, the four pilots were flying their B-26s to the area known as *Bahia de Cochinos - the Bay of Pigs* - expecting to provide air support to the beleaguered anti-Castro ground troops. At that point, the men on the beach were easy targets for Castro's pilots. The mission of the anti-Castro air effort was to penetrate the beachhead area, attack Castro forces, and destroy whatever they could.

Ray and Baker's aircraft was fired upon by at least one of the Cuban Air Force's T-33 aircraft; it may also have been hit by the extensive ground fire occurring in the area. Their B-26 went down in a ball of fire, crash landing on the beach. They both survived the crash and fled from the heavily damaged aircraft, but shortly thereafter were killed by Cuban militiamen.

Shamburger and Gray's B-26 was also hit as it approached the target area. When last glimpsed by another American B-26 pilot, it was at 100 feet above the beach, headed for the water at about 300 miles per hour. The plane hit the sea at a shallow angle. There were no survivors.

All four men were posthumously awarded the Agency's highest honor for bravery - the Distinguished Intelligence Cross - and they received four of the original 31 stars on the CIA Memorial Wall when it was created in 1974.



(On The Cover: **Lobo One**, by Jeffery Bass  
Photo portion of the painting depicting  
the Bay of Pigs beachhead air attack  
by CIA contract pilots)



# HALL OF FAME HONOREE



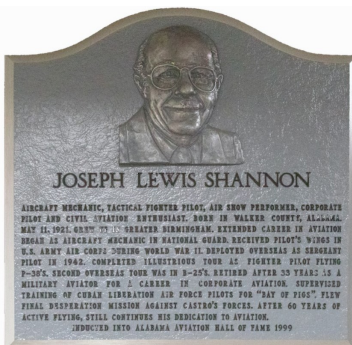
**Joseph Lewis Shannon** (1921-2010) was born in Coal Valley, AL. He graduated from Fairfield High School before joining the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1940. Shannon served as a Crew Chief before entering the Aviation Cadet Program of the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1942, and received his pilot wings at Napier Field, Alabama, on October 12, 1942. He flew 70 combat missions in Spitfires and P-38s in Europe and North Africa. In his second tour, he flew another 32 combat missions in B-25s in the China/Burma/India Theater. A highly decorated veteran, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, the Air Medal with 14 Oak Leaf clusters, and the Chinese Air Medal. Shannon continued his service in the Alabama Air National Guard for 32 years, retiring in 1972.



In 1961, he was called on to aid in the CIA training of Cuban exiles to fly aircraft in support of the Bay of Pigs invasion. Shannon flew a final desperation mission against Castro's forces to provide cover for Cuban troops. He was one of two U.S. pilots to survive the mission.



*"The CIA did not want any active duty U.S. military personnel involved in the operation," Shannon said in a 2007 interview. "The operation was not intended to defeat Castro's forces, but to spark an internal uprising which would eventually bring about the downfall of the Castro government."* He received the Cuban Liberation Air Force Medal for Valor and the CIA Seal Medallion.



Sharing his love for flight, Shannon was a founding director of the Southern Museum of Flight. He was a lifelong member of the Birmingham Aero Club and Quiet Birdmen. He was inducted into the Alabama Aviation Hall of Fame (1999), the Gathering of Eagles, and was awarded the Wright Brothers Master Pilot Award.

On January 20, 2001, the CIA honored those who participated in the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961. Below is the acceptance speech by a Birmingham native.

*"I, Carl 'Nick' Sudano am deeply humbled and grateful to have been awarded this honor from the most respected CIA. My participation in the Bay of Pigs operation was motivated by not only my desire to serve my country but also to help my Cuban brothers free their homeland from a communist tyranny. It was the right and decent path to travel. I consider it an honor to have served alongside of the Cuban Liberation Air Force of the 2506th Assault Brigade under the command of the CIA. I however do not consider it an honor to have served under the political leadership of the administration in elected office at that time. The arrogance and stupidity of decisions made by political hacks predestined our effort to fail. I've always classified it as a betrayal from within."*

*At this stage of my life, I don't think that I'll ever top this honor. Thank you, Mr. Director of Central Intelligence, your Deputy Directors, and representatives of the CIA."*

*I have special thanks to Col. Joe Shannon for his superb flying skills on that faithless day, the 19th of April 1961 while on our mission to support the men who were trapped on the beaches of the Bay of Pigs. You and I, Joe, are here today because of your superior flying skills. You're one hell of a stick, Joe, and you will always be an Ace in my book."*

*I would like to think that the spirit of those men who lost their lives during the Bay of Pigs operation are with us today and that we all say a silent thank you to them for having fought the good fight for freedom and a noble cause. Men and women of the Alabama Air Guard, you have a distinguished heritage. Be proud of the fact that you serve our republic and that this country respects and honors your efforts. I thank my sons, my daughters, their spouses, my grandchildren and my guests for sharing this very special day with me. In conclusion, I proudly accept this revered medallion, not only in my name but also in the name of all my American and Cuban comrades who fought the good, but fruitless fight. Thank you and God bless."*





# BAY OF PIGS - THE AFTERMATH

## April 1961—October 1962

In March 1960, President Eisenhower directed the CIA to develop a plan for the invasion of Cuba and overthrow of the Castro regime. The CIA organized an operation that trained and funded a force of exiled counter-revolutionary Cubans serving as the armed wing of the Democratic Revolutionary Front, known as Brigade 2506.

Following his election in November 1960, President John F. Kennedy learned of the invasion plan and after consultations with his advisors, approved the CIA-planned clandestine invasion of Cuba. Launched from Guatemala, the attack went wrong almost from the start. Components of Brigade 2506 landed at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961 and were defeated within 2 days by Cuban armed forces. The failed invasion strengthened the position of Castro to pursue closer ties with the Soviet Union and led to a reassessment of Cuba policy by the administration.

An examination and policy assessment of the causes of the defeat suffered at the Bay of Pigs was initiated in May 1961 which led in November of that year to a decision to implement a new covert program in Cuba, with the codename of Operation Mongoose. Mongoose was designed to do what the Bay of Pigs invasion failed to do: remove the Communist Castro regime from power in Cuba.

Orchestrated by the CIA and Defense Department under the direction of Edward Lansdale, Operation Mongoose constituted a multiplicity of plans with a wide-ranging purpose and scope. Lansdale outlined the coordinated program and monthly components of the operation were to be set in place to destabilize the communist regime, all leading up to preparations for an October 1962 military intervention in Cuba. Some of the planned Operation Mongoose actions were deployed during 1962, but military intervention did not occur, and the Castro regime remained in power.

Although not considered as significant a U.S. foreign policy failure and embarrassment as the Bay of Pigs invasion, Operation Mongoose failed to achieve its most important goals. Meanwhile, throughout the spring and summer of 1962, U.S. intelligence reports indicated expanded arms shipments from the Soviet Union to Cuba. Amidst growing concern over whether the Soviet weapons being introduced into Cuba included ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads, in October 1962 the Kennedy administration suspended

Operation Mongoose in the face of this far more serious threat - one that resulted in the most dangerous confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War; the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962.

While the Bay of Pigs invasion was never mentioned explicitly as a reason for stepping up U.S. efforts in space, this international situation certainly played a role as Kennedy scrambled to recover a measure of national dignity. Science Advisor Jerome Wiesner reflected, *"I don't think anyone can measure it, but I'm sure it [the invasion] had an impact. I think the President felt some pressure to get something else in the foreground."* T. Keith Glennan, NASA Administrator under Eisenhower, immediately linked the invasion and a Russian astronaut's flight as the seminal events leading to Kennedy's announcement of the Apollo decision. He confided in his diary that *"In the aftermath of that [Bay of Pigs] fiasco, and because of the successful orbiting of astronauts by the Soviet Union, it is my opinion that Mr. Kennedy asked for a reevaluation of the nation's space program."*

*In Memoriam*

**Raymon C. Ross, Jr.**  
(1932 - 2021)



**Raymon Ross** was a distinguished member of the Southern Museum of Flight's Board of Directors for over twenty years, as well as a respected and talented volunteer dedicated to the mission of the museum.

Raymon was a Korean War veteran and retired from Alabama Power Co. following a successful career there.

All will be reminded of Raymon's passion for aviation as they view the unique **Ross Seabird** on display at the museum. Raymon had invested 5,000 hours building this Sea Hawker amphibian kit plane while incorporating many major modifications to the original design.

His knowledge, wisdom and dedication will remain a lasting legacy to the museum.