

## Here is an exclusive interview with the American attorney who personally negotiated with the Cuban dictator for the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners

was a Cuban cigar humidor, a gift from Fidel. (Donovan gave Castro a camera.) "The Castro I came to know after our first meeting in August, 1962, is a fascinating man," Donovan said. "He's shrewd, complex, and a brilliant propagandist. Look how he irritates the United States with his little island! But he was very calm, correct, and confident with me."

Any calmness attributed to Fidel contradicts the dominant American impression of Castro as a boisterous tyrant spouting outlandish accusations to stimulate the emotions of the masses. But Donovan considers Castro's temper a political masquerade. He saw both Fidel, the showman, and Fidel, unmasked. "Castro is one complete actor," Donovan told me. "He could play Hamlet any day."

### The Man Behind the Beard

Castro's personal habits surprised Donovan. In contradiction to reports that he is sloppy, Castro appeared neat. A big, husky man, his familiar fatigue uniform was well-fitted and starched, his dark beard trimmed and singed.

Castro is frantically busy because he makes all decisions himself. And except for a few associates and several bodyguards, he usually is alone.

"He's a practical man," Donovan says, "but surprising, too. We'd meet at unexpected places (anywhere from an offshore island to boxing matches), and we sometimes drove 90 miles an hour getting there. Castro also is a night man. He works all night and sleeps from 8 a.m. to 1:30 in the afternoon."

Castro's reputation as an egotist who loves heroics is well-founded. His face mirrored admiration when he told Donovan: "You're going to be a big man. Americans love heroics. Your State Department could not come down here and accomplish this. Nor the Defense Department—why, it would have cost them tens of thousands of lives. Here you're going to get these prisoners out without losing one American life. They'll appreciate that."

But Castro also is a bluffer who tested Donovan's composure by employing the Red technique of mixing pleasantries and threats. He once told Donovan: "You are in circumstances similar to the Japanese peace ambassadors in Washington before Pearl Harbor. They had diplomatic immunity, but we could deal with you differently. You're in more danger than the prisoners."

Castro's threat didn't frighten Donovan, who is used to cloak-and-dagger situations. Instead, Donovan got tough. "Look," he snapped, "I'm the only market for these prisoners. You're not going to sell them any place else."

Donovan's firmness seemed to impress him. The negotiator recalls: "One of Castro's associates said Fidel appreciated the fact that I told him my position and feelings, not just something he wanted to hear. He said that Castro considered me different from most diplomats and thus he could deal with me. He realized that I wasn't hoodwinking him or spying."

Still Fidel doesn't encourage outsiders to radiate confidence. He is a supersensitive man who enjoys flashing his authority and seeking small-time recognition. Although he found the exchange agreement (written in longhand by Donovan) entirely satisfactory, he still made some immaterial changes in the document. "You know now," he told Donovan, sticking out his jaw, "that I am also a lawyer."

Fidel showed off his authority again while he and Donovan were awaiting the first ship carrying ransom goods. Castro dramatically ordered his Soviet MIG fighters to stage an acrobatic show over Havana. But Donovan deflated the Cuban dictator's ego a bit by quipping, "Here comes that invasion you've been talking about."

Castro's ability to emote on cue was dramatically demonstrated one day soon after the prisoners' release. President Kennedy had told the liberated invaders that "their flag will someday fly over Free Havana." Fidel, in a violent speech that ended after 92 minutes only because his voice gave out, roared in reply: "It will fly over the Free Havana Bar in Miami."

### Time Off for Strange Behavior

But offstage, he bubbled with amity. Shortly after this anti-American tirade, Donovan, accompanied by his son John, 18, arrived in Havana to gain the release of three Central Intelligence Agency employees. Castro stopped work for two days to entertain them!

"We will take Don-a-wan spear fishing and skin diving at 3 in the morning," Castro said.

"Where?" an associate asked.

"Where the ladyfish are!" Castro shot back. "The Bay of Pigs—where else?"

Although Havana has a scenic beach, Castro ordered his party driven 93 miles south, on

Cuba's opposite coast, to the Bay of Pigs area. (Castro is so proud of the invasion site that he is offering a \$15,000 prize, to be awarded by a jury of architects from seven countries, for the best victory monument design.)

Changing into his swimsuit, Castro insisted that he wanted only to talk fishing. He threatened to leave if he heard politics from Donovan. "He then gave my son a one-hour lecture on the invasion," Donovan said. "Castro explained he was desperate for military supplies. But he felt confident the people were with him." (Castro's estimate proved right; invasion strategists relied on a simultaneous civilian uprising.)

The bearded dictator self-righteously proclaimed that he was not concerned with outside judgment which branded him a slave trader. "World opinion is nothing," he scoffed at Donovan. "Everyone knows I don't read these things."

But Castro asked Donovan to explain articles about himself and Cuba that appeared in U.S. publications. "Every trip, I always had an awful lot of stories to discuss," Donovan said.

### Donovan Explains His Mission

Once Castro and Donovan were at a run-down villa still occupied by an invasion prisoner's father, and Fidel said casually, "Don-a-wan, tell me your philosophy. What motivates you to come here, to be among enemy people, to do this?"

Donovan reached into his coat pocket and pulled out a printed card containing a prayer of Saint Francis. He read: "Make me an instrument of Your peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope . . . where there is sadness, joy . . . It is in pardoning that we are pardoned."

Fidel, master of the firing squad, listened intently. "Yes," he said solemnly, "this is a very fine objective. I agree entirely with it. But you know, the methods you and I employ to accomplish such objectives are a little different."

This double-talk perhaps best exemplifies Castro's thinking and personality. When the last ransom ship left Havana, an "exasperated" Castro accused the United States of "reneging on the agreement." Naturally, Fidel is a callous, calculating man who utilized a profitable deal without neglecting his dedicated Red aims.

As James B. Donovan says, "Fidel is one fascinating propagandist."