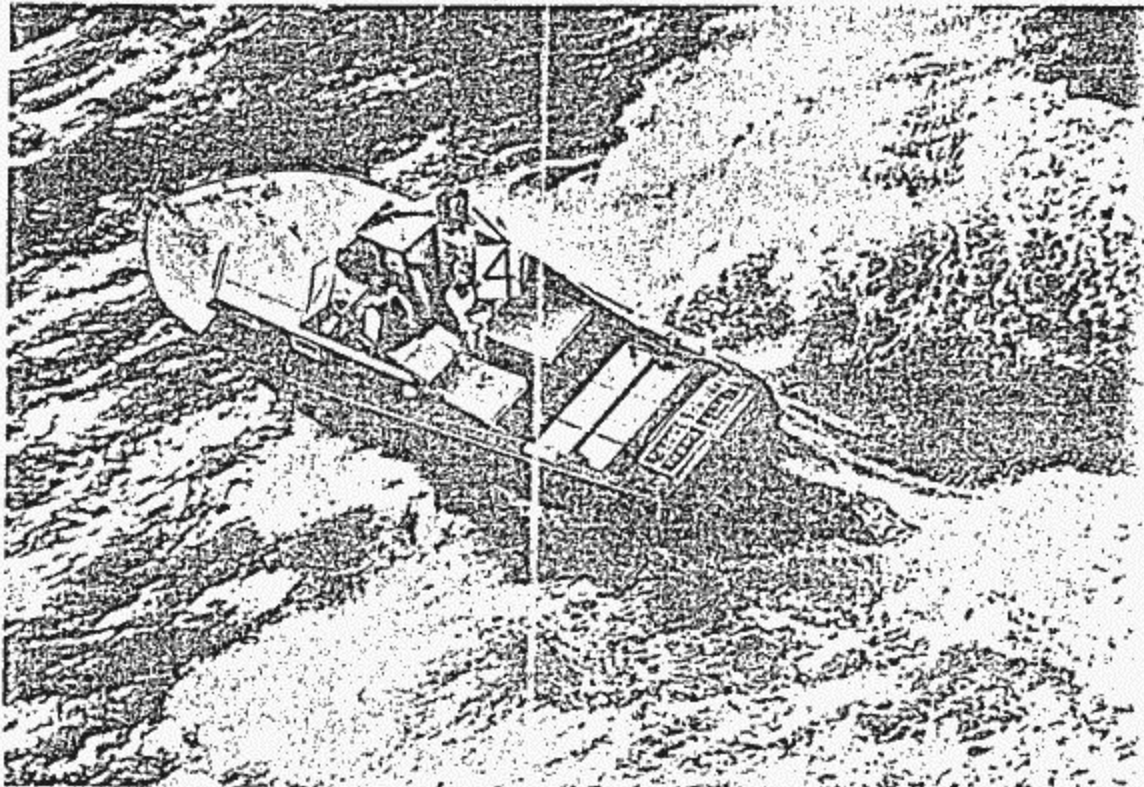


or killed on a mission. They supported all the families of the Brigade members, and they did the same for the families of the men who were lost on our operations. They are still supporting them.

"Once a Castro gunboat came after my boat on a mission off the north coast of Cuba, and I radioed for help. Before we could even decode the return message from the base, I looked up, and there were two Phantom jets and a Neptune flying over us. It's a trademark of the American forces in general. You have seen how in Vietnam if a helicopter goes down, ten other helicopters will fly in to get the pilot out. That was the same spirit that prevailed in our operations. I still believe today that the Company might be able to do something for me about the Watergate someday."

The cowboys of JM WAVE



... of the PT 73, a 26-footer in 1959. Later, he supplied larger craft than this 26-footer.

ANOTHER KIND OF VOLUNTEER prominent in the secret war was perhaps best exemplified by the late William (Rip) Robertson. Robertson represented a special breed of CIA operative—men with names like Boy Scout and Rudy and Mike—who led the military side of the secret war. They were not case officers—the bureaucrats and diplomats who comprise the Agency's permanent staff. Instead, they were independent specialists under renewable contract to the CIA, known as "paramilitaries," "PMs," or "cowboys." Ray Cline explained their role in the Agency's work: "You need to understand the national consensus of the 1950s and '60s, when we believed the world was a tough place filled with actual threats of subversion by other countries. The Russians had cowboys around everywhere, and that meant we had to get ourselves a lot of cowboys if we wanted to play the game. You've got to have cowboys—the only thing is you don't let them make policy. You keep them in the ranch house when you don't have a specific project for them."

At the time of his arrival in Miami in the summer of 1961, Robertson already had become a figure of romance. He had fought behind the lines in Korea for the CIA, and he had endeared himself to the CIA's Cuban agents by his performance at the Bay of Pigs. Despite President Kennedy's orders that no Americans land in the invasion, Robertson was the first man ashore on one of the beaches. Later, when Castro's forces started routing the invaders, he went back in voluntarily to rescue survivors. In Washington, during the investigation into the CIA's handling of the invasion, Robertson appeared as a witness and talked at length with Robert Kennedy. He told his Cuban commandos that Kennedy was all right, which they took as a high compliment, since Robertson hated all politicians.

Rip Robertson was close to fifty by the time he started running paramilitary operations against Castro. He was a big man, about six foot two, with a perpetual slouch and wrinkled clothes. Everything about him was unconventional. He wore a baseball cap and glasses tied behind his head with a string, and always had a pulp novel stuffed in his back pocket. From the military point of view, nothing looked right about his appearance, but to the Cubans he was an idol who represented the best part of the American spirit and the hope of the secret war. Ramon Orozco, one of his commandos, remembers what the paramilitary operations were like:

"After the Bay of Pigs is when the great heroic deeds of Rip really began. I was on one of his teams, but he controlled many teams and many operations. And everything was good through 1963. Our team made more than seven big war missions. Some of them were huge: the attacks on the Texaco refinery, the Russian ships in Oriente Province, a big lumberyard, the Patrice Lumumba sulfuric acid plant at Santa Lucia, and the diesel plant at Casilda. But they never let us fight as much as we wanted to, and most of the operations were infiltrations and weapons drops.

"We would go on missions to Cuba almost every week. When we didn't go, Rip would feel sick and get very mad. He was always blowing off his steam, but then he would call us his boys, and he would hug us and hit us in the stomach. He was always trying to crank us up for the missions. Once he told me, 'I'll give you \$50 if you bring me back an ear.' I brought him two, and he laughed and said, 'You're crazy,' but he paid me \$100, and he took us to his house for a turkey dinner. Rip was a patriot, an American patriot. Really, I think he was a fanatic. He'd fight anything that came against democracy. He fought with the Company in Korea, in Cuba, and then he went to Vietnam. He never stopped, but he also went to church and he practiced democracy."

At the end of December, 1961, Orozco went on a ten-day operation with a seven-man team. The commandos blew up a railroad bridge and watched a train run off the ruptured tracks. Then they burned down a sugar warehouse, and on Christmas Day, with a detachment of militia apparently in pursuit, they sought to escape in their rubber boat to an intermediary ship on which Rip and Martinez waited for them. By this time, the American officers were not supposed to be going into Cuban waters, much less to the shore, and Rip had already been reprimanded for his previous adventures. Nevertheless, when his commandos missed their first rendezvous, Rip loaded a rubber boat with rockets and recoilless rifles, ordered another commando, Nestor Izquierdo, to get in with him, and then motored up and down the coast looking for signs of his men. He was back on Martinez's ship when Orozco called him from the shore.

"We had a problem with the motor when we finally got in the boat. I had just shot some guy with an M-3 silencer, and we had to get out, so we radioed Rip with the distress signal: 'Pittsburgh, Pittsburgh.' Well, Rip came right into the bay. When we saw him, we said, 'That is the old man for you.' We called him the old man. And then he called out, 'Come on, my boys!' Later he told me why he had to come in for us. 'I couldn't lose the crazy guy,' he said. He always called me the crazy guy."

Despite orders, Rip continued to go on operations with his commandos. His superiors became so angry that they resorted to ordering the Cuban boat captains not to allow him to board the intermediary ships that took the teams to the shore. One of the boat captains from those days, now a Washington lawyer, recalled the futility of this restraint:

"Rip was not supposed to get on the intermediary boat 'not under any conditions.' One time, he was on my mother-ship, and his boys were about to go on an operation. He said he felt sick, very sick, and then he goes down in the ship as if he is going to lie down. The next minute there's Rip with his face all black with charcoal, and he is wearing the uniform of the commandos—the hat and everything—and he is all slouched down in the boat in the middle of the men pretending he is not Rip. People knew it was him, but what could we do?"

"I loved Rip, but oh, my God! He was not the kind of man you want as your enemy. If the United States had just 200 Rips, it wouldn't have any problems in the world. He loved war, but it was very difficult for him to adjust to the kind of warfare we were making. He wanted an open war, and we were waging a silent one."

UNDER THE BEST OF CIRCUMSTANCES, the paramilitaries were a hard group to control, but the problem was particularly intense during the secret war because they came to identify so closely with their Cuban agents and with the cause of wresting Cuba from Castro, whom they saw as a simple tool of the Russians. They were creatures of the Cold War, responding to the new call from the tough young President who was not about to tolerate a Communist menace just ninety miles from Florida. It was a time of high winds and strong feelings in politics. As the case officer who worked with Robertson remarked: "It's almost impossible today to put yourself back in those times when idealism ran so high, and we felt we were on a crusade against evil, but that was what we felt."

"People think of the CIA's paramilitary officers as thugs. But you would be amazed to meet them. In Miami there was every conceivable kind of person represented in the paramilitary units. Some had Ph.D.s, and some had gone to Ivy League schools. There were a few who had lots of money, and of course there were some adventurer types. All of them were very emotional about their work. I've seen lots of them cry at their failures, and there were many failures because of the high casualties on these operations."

The difficulties of control were so great that the Agency often didn't know which missions were leaving in which directions. The various Cuban movements often wanted independent raids to build their stature and reputation among the anti-Castro Cubans. Some wanted to impress the Company with their skills in the hope of obtaining jobs and financial support, while others went on their own in order to escape CIA restrictions and control. JM WAVE gave some of these raids the green light of encouragement, some the yellow light of toleration, and others the red light of disapproval—in which event the FBI or Immigration or the Coast Guard would be alerted to enforce the law.

The confused maze of anti-Castro activity in South Florida during the secret war included everything from officially organized, elaborate CIA teams to impromptu groups of zealous students seeking to make a name for themselves. This vagueness was well suited to the purposes of JM WAVE. To the extent that an attack on Cuba was independent, it cut down on the station's enormous budget. And the existence of the independent movements helped mask the station's own