



Historian Skip Sommer has restored historic properties in Sonoma and Marin Counties, including The Great Petaluma Mill, The River House, and Larkspur's famed Lark Creek Inn & Shoppes. He has been credited with starting the restoration of historic Petaluma's downtown. Skip is a lifetime member of Heritage Homes of Petaluma, a Board member of The Petaluma Historical Museum and a recipient of Petaluma's "Good Egg of The Year" award. Contact Skip at [skipsommer@hotmail.com](mailto:skipsommer@hotmail.com)

## STORIES FROM THE PAST

### The Bay of Pigs Fiasco

by History Editor Skip Sommer

It was April of 1961. Jack Kennedy had only been President for three months and he had been informed by former President Eisenhower that the Central Intelligence Agency was well into a plan to fund and help a group of counter-revolutionaries invade the country of Cuba and overthrow Fidel Castro. Ike had appropriated \$13 million dollars for this CIA operation and was passing the whole deal on to JFK.

What to do? President Kennedy's decision was partially



guided by the disclosure on April first of a Cuban plot to assassinate the entire Kennedy family on vacation in Palm Beach, Florida. Was it true? Or could it have been a deception put in place by CIA Director Allen Dulles? We'll never know, but Castro had instituted many moves against U.S. interests and it was a situation of "one more

straw will indeed break this camel's back."

Fidel Castro had made his stance very clear. He had taken over the oil refineries of Shell, Esso and Standard Oil, appropriated American economic interests, taken control of the press and kicked out hundreds of American banks and businesses (including such American icons as Coca Cola, Hershey Sugar and Sears). Castro had severed all ties to the U.S. and replaced them with Soviet ties. Soviet Premier Khrushchev was elated.

In retaliation, the United States cancelled all imports of Cuban sugar (that country's most important export) and prohibited all exports from the U.S. to Cuba, with the exception of medicines. Thus was fomented an invasion idea involving Cuban ex-patriots, but organized and funded by our CIA in our country.

In Petaluma, the Argus-Courier headlined, "Anti-Castro pilots train for Cuba flight" and "A second war of liberation for Cuba". Castro had said that "despite a U.S. economic blockade, Cuba will not lack

essentials". The Petaluma Mayoral term of Art Parent was ending at that time and Fred Mattei, Everett Matzen and Bob Brunner had said they would be running for Mayor. It was also rumored that a teacher named Helen Putnam may consider running for the Board of Education. The City Council was considering turning the Lafferty Ranch into a public park (still an issue today!). Also under consideration was converting the old Phillip Sweed School building into a Petaluma Museum with a tax levy to raise \$40,000. It didn't happen.

On April 10, President Kennedy ruled out "any direct intervention by U.S. forces in Cuba". Yet, on April 17, Argus headlines read, "Liberators invade Cuba by sea and air!" and adding that "Castro says U.S. planned attack." (The U.S. denied it at that time). The Soviet paper Izvestia stated, "The communist world will stand behind Castro".

Nikita Khrushchev formally asked JFK to stop the "menace to world peace" and our April 18 Argus editorial asked the following questions: "What will Russia do?" "Are the Cubans against Castro?" JFK warned

Khrushchev to "keep his hands off Cuba". That apparently didn't help.... The "game" was definitely "on" and the world, once again, was on the brink of war.

In other news that month, Russian Yuri Gagarin had become the first human to orbit the earth (upon his return, Khrushchev kissed him on the mouth), "The Apartment" won the Oscar, the hot TV show was "What's My Line?", a young Olympic boxer named Cassius Clay turned professional, and S.F. Giants star Willie Mays hit FOUR homers in one game (who pitched that?).

Meanwhile, President Kennedy called in ex-President Eisenhower for an urgent conference. The invasion into the Bay of Pigs had failed



miserably and the invading forces had surrendered just three days later. Fidel Castro made a four-hour ranting speech against the U.S. and

tensions had elevated world wide. JFK then called in Republican Governor Nelson Rockefeller, former President Harry Truman, Republican Senator Barry Goldwater and former Vice-President Nixon for their urgent advice. All those commentaries are sealed.

In The Argus-Courier, syndicated columnist James Marlowe said, "fingers are pointed at the CIA for the failure of information collection. The CIA was up to its neck in this invasion". (Sounds familiar, doesn't it?--- i.e., "weapons of mass destruction"). Meanwhile, on April 24, President Kennedy stated, "I accept sole responsibility".

The community of Petaluma was duly alarmed at the prospect of another war, yet in the April 25 Argus editorial regarding Nikita Khrushchev's warnings, the Editor said, "If we find it necessary to intervene in Cuba, then we are not going to be lectured on interventions by those who squashed Hungary's freedom". (Pretty gutsy small-town U.S.A. reaction, I think).

The U.S. blockade of Havana Harbor and the zenith of the cold war "missile crisis" with the Soviet Union were still to come, that April of 1961.

**THE PAWN ADVANTAGE**  
"GET THE ADVANTAGE" ★ STORE®

Celebrating Butter & Egg Days!

509 Fourth Street, Santa Rosa, CA 707-527-PAWN  
157 Petaluma Blvd. No., Petaluma, CA 707-763-PAWN  
846 Fourth Street, San Rafael, CA 415-479-PAWN

**MP Petaluma Minuteman Press®**

1 TO 4 COLOR OFFSET PRINTING | DIGITAL COLOR PRINTING | HIGH SPEED DIGITAL COPYING

- Business Cards
- Letterhead
- Envelopes
- Brochures
- Newsletters
- Booklets
- Mailers
- Flyers
- Labels
- Stamps
- Promo Items
- Graphic Services

Phone (707) 763-4188 • Fax (707) 763-9541

139 Lakeville Street Petaluma, CA 94952

orders@minutemanpetaluma.com • www.minutemanpetaluma.com