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Richard Bissell - Spy Master

Lead: In the early 1960s Richard Bissell was the fair-haired luminary of the CIA. His hubris and naiveté helped pave the way for the disaster at the Bay of Pigs.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Richard Bissell was typical of a generation of upper class leaders who were attracted to government service by World War II and stayed around to manage the vastly expanded federal establishment. His roots were pure WASP. His father

was head of the Hartford Fire Insurance Company. Groton for prep school, Yale as a precocious undergraduate and research at the London School of Economics led to a short stint teaching at Yale. Poor eyesight prevented combat service, but he signed on with the Shipping Adjustment Board where he developed a brilliant system for keeping track of all cargo ships at sea. His abilities attracted the attention of the Truman administration for work implementing the Marshall Plan. During the early days of the Cold War, Bissell was recruited by Allen Dulles into the Central Intelligence Agency. With little supervision in the early days, the CIA engaged in a wide variety of covert activities including armed

intervention and the occasional wet job. In this shadowy world of secrecy plot, and counter plot, Bissell excelled. He led the development of the U-2 spy plane. Appointed head of covert operations, he had 50 stations and \$100,000,000 a year to spend. Most of his secret plans failed including his most infamous achievement was the Bay of Pigs invasion. In April 1961 a CIA-led ragtag army of Cuban exiles was crushed by Fidel Castro. The plan, ill-conceived from the beginning, also was the victim of White House timidity. Richard Bissell took the fall. He was edged out by the humiliated Kennedy administration and retired to Hartford where he died in 1993.

**At the University of Richmond, this
is Dan Roberts.**

Resources

**Thomas, Evan. "Wayward Spy," *Civilization 2* (5,
September-October 1995): 36-45.**

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