

# The Lake Placid News

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## In '62, Santa Was a Lawyer Coming Home to Lake Placid

BY GEORGE CARROLL

It was Christmas Eve in Havana, Cuba, 1962. Time zones being what they are, it was also Christmas Eve far to the north, in the Adirondack village of Lake Placid.

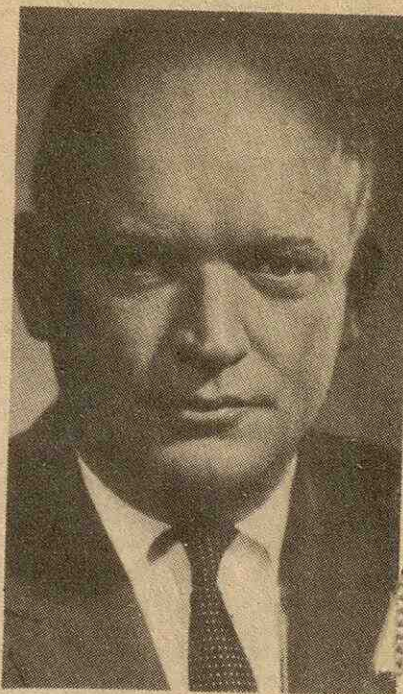
And this last, hard fact was beginning to trouble a man named Jim Donovan. Here he was, Donovan reminded himself, still in Havana a full day after he'd hoped to finish the business that had brought him here. His family -- his wife Mary, his son and daughters -- would already have settled in for another Christmas at Lake Placid, where Donovan had promised to join them.

But apart from this very personal cloud on his horizon, James Britt Donovan of Brooklyn, N.Y. was a man whose cup must have been overflowing. He was not a professional diplomat. He was a lawyer, and a highly successful one. But much earlier on this day before Christmas, working unaided, in a country with which his own country no longer enjoyed diplomatic relations -- the lawyer had scored a diplomatic coup of historic importance.

Now -- barring some last minute hitch -- Cuba's all powerful dictator Fidel Castro would give Jim Donovan everything that he'd come to get. Castro would release in Donovan's care his Bay-of-Pigs prisoners. Hundreds of them. The sick and the maimed survivors of a once-proud invading force that had failed over a year and a half ago to wrest their beloved homeland from the dictator's grip.

Donovan, the tough-bargaining but somehow likable American, could take the prisoners as far as Castro was concerned. Take them back from where they'd come, to that hated colossus to the north.

Of course, Castro would be well paid for his act of clemency. Not in money, but in something that Cuba needed far more -- tons of embargoed American medicine, especially antibiotics. Plus all manner of medical



James Donovan

and surgical supplies and baby food to be freely donated by America's leading pharmaceutical companies.

Jim Donovan was waiting where he'd been told to wait, in a carefully restricted area of Havana's National Airport, the one American in a knot of Cuba's high military and governmental figures. And not far away, the planes were waiting too, big American airliners that would carry Castro's prisoners to freedom, deliver them to families and friends even now waiting at the U.S. Air Force Base at Homestead, Fla., south of Miami.

So all was in readiness, Donovan kept re-assuring himself. But still the clock ticked away, and nothing was happening.

James Britt Donovan first made headlines back in 1957, when he agreed to take on the defense of the Russian spy known as Colonel Rudolph Abel. Donovan had just checked in at the Lake Placid Club for a much-needed summer holiday

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