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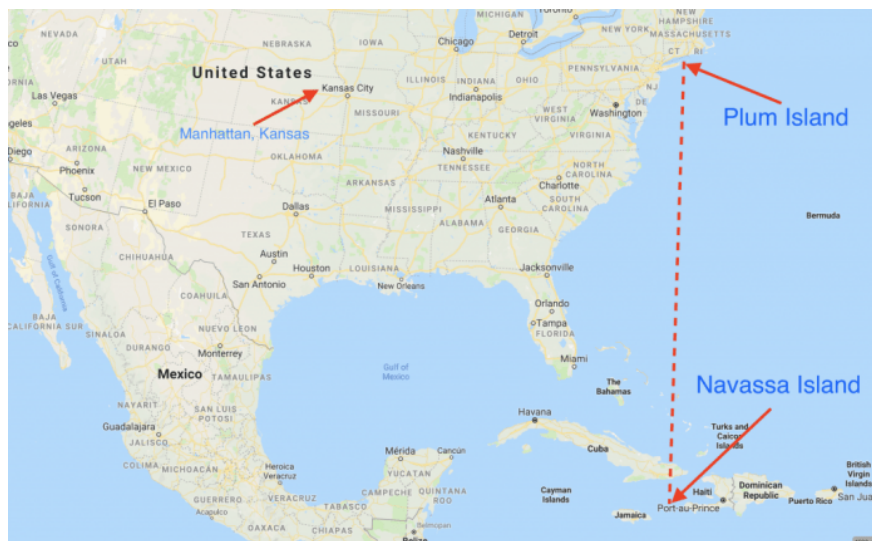
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By [Ken Lawrence](#)

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New Evidence Implicates CIA in 1971 Attack on Cuba with African Swine Fever Virus



Plum Island, location of the U.S. Army Chemical Corps base at Fort Terry from 1952 to 1956, was established to pursue a program of research and development of certain anti-animal (BW) agents. (a.k.a. biological weapons) The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) continues to operate the Plum Island center while they build a new home for the laboratory at **Manhattan, Kansas**, scheduled to open in 2021 as the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF). **Navassa Island** is the location where the Navy was investigating the possible presence of biological toxins around the time that agents were reported to have brought dangerous microbes to the island in preparation for a biological attack on Cuba. [Source: CovertAction Magazine]

[Ken Lawrence is an investigative journalist and veteran writer for CovertAction Magazine. Since the magazine's founding in the late 1970's, Lawrence regularly penned the popular column "Sources and Methods." See the [archives](#). In this piece, he presents new evidence of the 1971 CIA attack on Cuba with the African Swine Fever virus (ASFV).—Editors.]

["Cuban Outbreak of Swine Fever Linked to CIA"](#) headlined a January 9, 1977, article by Drew Featherston and John Cummings in *Newsday*, a Long Island, New York, daily paper. It began,

With at least the tacit backing of U.S. Central Intelligence Agency officials, operatives linked to anti-Castro terrorists introduced African swine fever virus into Cuba in 1971. Six weeks later an outbreak of the disease forced the slaughter of 500,000 pigs to prevent a nationwide animal epidemic.

A U.S. intelligence source told *Newsday* he was given the virus in a sealed, unmarked container at a U.S. Army base and CIA training ground in the Panama Canal Zone, with instructions to turn it over to the anti-Castro group.

The 1971 outbreak, the first and only time the disease has hit the Western Hemisphere, was labeled the "most alarming event" of 1971 by the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization. African swine fever is a highly contagious and usually lethal viral disease that infects only pigs and, unlike swine flu, cannot be transmitted to humans. There were no human deaths in the outbreak, but all production of pork, a Cuban staple, came to a halt, apparently for several months. . . .

The U.S. intelligence source said that early in 1971 he was given the virus in a sealed, unmarked container at Ft. Gulick, an Army base in the Panama Canal Zone. The CIA also operated a paramilitary training center for career personnel and mercenaries at Ft. Gulick. . . .

Another man involved in the operation, a Cuban exile who asked not to be identified, said he was on the trawler where the virus was put aboard at a rendezvous point off Bocas del Toro, Panama. He said the trawler carried the virus to Navassa Island, a tiny, deserted, U.S.-owned island between Jamaica and Haiti. From there, after the trawler made a brief stopover, the container was taken to Cuba and given to other operatives on the southern coast near the U.S. Navy base at Guantanamo Bay in late March, according to the source on the trawler.

It was an explosive story, reprinted in newspapers across the country. The [CIA officially denied](#) it six days later, in response to a request from the U.S. Senate Select Committee on

Intelligence, but the *Newsday* reporters had cited so many corroborating sources, with such specific details, that the denial was not widely believed.

The most compelling reason for trusting the credibility of the *Newsday* report was that the only place in the Western Hemisphere where the virus was known to have been kept before the outbreak in Cuba was at the secret Plum Island Animal Disease Center (PIADC) laboratory off the eastern tip of Long Island, where local *Newsday* reporters had been cultivating sources since the one and only time reporters had been allowed inside in October 1971.

Plum Island had hosted the U.S. Army Chemical Corps base at Fort Terry from 1952 to 1956. According to *Deadly Cultures: Biological Weapons since 1945* by Mark Wheelis and Lajos Rózsa, the mission at Fort Terry was “to establish and pursue a program of research and development of certain anti-animal (BW) agents.” (a.k.a. biological weapons) The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) took over from the Army in 1956.

President Richard Nixon ordered biological weapons research to cease in 1969, but in 1975 the [U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence revealed that the CIA had continued to maintain a stockpile of biological agents and toxins in violation of the order.](#)

Newsday had made no mention of Plum Island, perhaps to protect its reporters’ sources, but other reporters quickly made the connection. In the 2004 book, *Lab 257* by Michael Christopher Carroll, the author wrote,

According to the federal government, Plum Island is the only location in the United States where African swine fever virus is permitted. No one will say on the record that the virus for the Cuban mission was prepared on Plum Island and sent to Fort Gulick. However, given the frequent traffic between Plum Island and Fort Detrick, Maryland samples—with or without the USDA’s knowledge of the ultimate purpose—could have been sent to Fort Detrick for transshipment to Fort Gulick. . . .

Norman Covert, Fort Detrick’s historian, shows how the CIA could easily have been involved—and unwittingly co-opted Plum Island. “There were CIA people who infiltrated the [Fort Detrick] laboratories. They did their own work with LSD and other psycho-illnesses. They had their own cell there—they worked on their own, and I suspect a very small circle of people knew that.” This type of information isolation—informing people of project details on a need-to-know basis—is the brand of secrecy that might have been used to poison Cuba’s food supply with germs. Compartmentalization of each step made Plum Island an unknowing accomplice when it trafficked in viruses between Fort Detrick and elsewhere.

Efforts to explain away the outbreak as a natural occurrence do not hold up to close examination. The theory that food wastes from Spanish aircraft were fed to domestic pigs fails to address that Cuba, like the United States, had always kept their nation disease-free through strict importation quarantines. Cuban investigators claim ASFV broke out simultaneously in two distant locations; germ warfare experts say that contemporaneous sites of infection are unnatural and point to a deliberately caused outbreak. Because it is impossible to disprove, the logic of a methodical scientist dictates that a germ warfare attack cannot be ruled out. CIA assassination plots (some of which involved germs) and the Bay of Pigs invasion stand as acknowledged covert acts by the United States government to force regime change upon Cuba.



View from Plum Island, bottom of photo, site of the U.S. Department of Agriculture laboratory for infectious animal diseases. At top of photo is Orient Point, Long Island, two miles away and separated by the waters of Plum Gut channel. (October 23, 1971) [Source: AP wirephoto]

Forty-nine years after the biological warfare attack on Cuba, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) continues to operate the Plum Island center while DHS builds a new home for the laboratory at Manhattan, Kansas, scheduled to open in 2021, to be known as the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF).

USDA will own, manage, and operate the new facility, as it formerly did at Plum Island. According to the DHS website, “The federal government will execute a plan to provide for seamless transition of the agricultural defense mission from PIADC to the NBAF that includes an overlap of operations to make certain there is no interruption of the critical science mission and operational capabilities.”

4. The Group then turned to a discussion of number 32 (agricultural sabotage). General Carter emphasized the extreme sensitivity of any such operation and the disastrous results that would flow from something going wrong, particularly if there were obvious attribution to the U.S. He went on to say, however, that it would be possible to accomplish this purpose by methods more subtle than those indicated in the paper. He mentioned specifically the possibility of producing crop failures by the introduction of biological agents which would appear to be of natural origin. Mr. Bundy said that he had no worries about any such sabotage which could clearly be made to appear as the result of local Cuban disaffection or of a natural disaster, but that we must avoid external activities such as release of chemicals, etc., unless they could be completely covered up.

JFK files reveal U.S. biological warfare plans against Cuba. [source: whowhatwhy.org]

Today, as in 1977, the government officially denies sponsoring an offensive biological warfare program. Further, today, as then, it asserts claims of security that prevent any effective independent verification and critical oversight. But a scarcely noticed detail of the *Newsday* report offers grounds for a fresh look at the evidence of the 1971 attack:

...the trawler carried the virus to Navassa Island, a tiny, deserted, U.S.-owned island between Jamaica and Haiti. From there, after the trawler made a brief stopover, the container was taken to Cuba...

Despite Haiti's objection since 1858, Navassa Island is the original United States overseas possession claimed in 1857 and officially declared a U.S. "appurtenance" in 1859. My Navassa research file includes a previously unreported document that lends circumstantial support to the *Newsday* story—a 1986 typescript draft of an article by U.S. Coast Guard lighthouse historian Neil Hurley titled "Navassa Island Light, 'Where Chickens Only Miraculously Survive the Attacks of Lizards.'"



Despite Haiti's objection since 1858, Navassa Island is the original United States overseas possession, claimed in 1857 and officially declared a U.S. "appurtenance" in 1859. [Source: CovertAction Magazine]

When Hurley's article appeared in the Winter 1988 issue of *The Keeper's Log*, under the title "Navassa Lighthouse," these two sentences from his earlier draft were omitted: "In 1971, a U.S. Navy Research team visited the Island to look for animal diseases that could be transmitted to man. They found one bird carrying malaria."

It might be a coincidence, but it seems remarkable that the Navy was investigating the possible presence of biological toxins on Navassa Island at about the time that agents were reported to have brought dangerous microbes to Navassa for a biological attack on Cuba.

By itself, the two-sentence unpublished excerpt from Hurley's monograph doesn't amount to much. However, two U.S. Navy missions to Swan Island off the coast of Honduras in 1960 and 1961 provided essential logistical support for the CIA's communication and propaganda center for the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

The unpublished lines in Hurley's typescript leave this lingering question unanswered: Did the 1971 U.S. Navy mission to Navassa Island provide support for an African swine fever attack on Cuba, a decade after two Navy missions transported supplies to another Caribbean island for the CIA's failed invasion of Cuba?

Ken Lawrence is an investigative journalist and veteran writer for *CovertAction Magazine*. Since the magazine's founding in the late 1970's, Lawrence regularly penned the popular column "Sources and Methods." See the [archives](#).

Lawrence was born in 1942 and raised in Chicago. At age 17, in 1960, he traveled to Atlanta to attend the conference of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and witnessed the emerging civil rights movement at first hand. The following spring, after his second year of college, Lawrence left school to become a full-time activist. He moved to Mississippi in 1971 to work full time as an organizer and writer. From 1971 to 1975, he was the Deep South representative of the Southern Conference Educational Fund (SCEF), and correspondent for The Southern Patriot, a monthly civil-rights movement paper. Today, Lawrence is a free-lance writer, researcher, editor, lecturer, historian, and media consultant living in rural Pennsylvania.

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