

## **Jurors Hear Tape Of Cuban Mig Pilot**

**Miami Herald, The (FL)-February 16, 2001**

**Author: ALFONSO CHARDY, [achardy@herald.com](mailto:achardy@herald.com)**

In one of the most dramatic moments of the ongoing Cuban spy trial, jurors on Thursday heard the excited voice of a Cuban MiG pilot celebrating the shootdown of two Brothers to the Rescue planes five years ago.

``We got him, damn it! We got him!" the pilot yells after shooting down the first plane. A few minutes later, after downing the second, he screams: ``The other one destroyed! The other one destroyed! Fatherland or death, damn it. The other one down, too!"

Jurors and relatives of the four men killed in the Feb. 24, 1996, shootdown silently followed the voice recordings while reading an English- and Spanish-language transcript of the audio tape prepared by federal prosecutors.

Though a brief and silent video of the aftermath of the shootdown was recently played for jurors, the audiotape was the first time since the trial began in late November that the actual voices of the Cuban pilots were heard in court. The tape, made by the U.S. military from intercepts of Cuban military transmissions, was originally released shortly after the shootdown.

The shootdown is the centerpiece of the U.S. government's case against five defendants accused of trying to infiltrate Cuban exile organizations and U.S. military installations.

Lead defendant Gerardo Hernandez is specifically charged with conspiracy to commit murder in connection with the shootdown.

Prosecutors say Cuban intelligence ordered Hernandez to ``facilitate a bloody confrontation" to end Brothers to the Rescue's repeated ``provocation missions" into Cuban airspace. Federal authorities say Hernandez gave Cuba the flight plan of the Brothers planes and then - after the shootdown - received a congratulatory note saying ``We have dealt the Miami right a hard blow."

Three Brothers planes flew out of Opa-locka airport in the early afternoon of Feb. 24, 1996, to spot Cuban rafters. One plane was piloted by Brothers leader Jose Basulto.

The second was piloted by Mario de la Pena who was assisted by raft spotter Armando Alejandro. The third contained pilot Carlos Costa and spotter Pablo Morales.

One MiG pilot shot down both planes. He was not identified in court, but after the shootdown, Cuban government radio identified him as Alberto Perez Perez in command of a MiG-29. He was followed closely by brother Francisco Perez Perez piloting a MiG-23A. In the tape, the MiG-29 pilot is identified by his call sign 08.

Action leading to the first shootdown begins at around 3:20 p.m. when 08 reports sighting the first target: Costa's plane.

``Target lock-on, authorize us!" 08 tells Cuban air traffic control. ``Target lock-on,

authorize us!"

A few seconds later he screams: ``It's a Cessna 3-37. That one, that one, that one . . .! That's the one! Authorize us, damn it."

Seven seconds later, a calm voice is heard.

``Fire," it says.

Perhaps unaware of the command, 08 screams again: ``Authorize us, damn it, we have it!"

The calm voice says: ``Zero-eight, authorized to destroy."

About a minute later, 08 shouts: ``First shot. We got him damn it! We got him!" The cussing and cheering in the MiG's cockpit continued for several minutes.

``Cojones, we got him! F---!" 08 shouts. ``This one won't f-- around anymore."

About seven minutes later, 08 scored another hit, shooting down De la Pena's plane. Cussing and cheering followed suit.

Basulto survived the attack and returned to Opa-locka. A witness in the trial, Basulto is planning to fly to the general shutdown area Feb. 24 to mark the event's fifth anniversary. While overflying the site, Basulto plans to drop leaflets to honor the four people killed in the shutdown.

Edition: Final  
Section: Local  
Page: 1B

Record Number: 0102170300  
Copyright (c) 2001 The Miami Herald

[http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/agdocs/AWNB/0EB72FE947E8A94D/0D0CB4F723A99D0A?p\\_multi=MIHB&s\\_lang=en-US](http://docs.newsbank.com/s/InfoWeb/agdocs/AWNB/0EB72FE947E8A94D/0D0CB4F723A99D0A?p_multi=MIHB&s_lang=en-US)