

## **Cuban Spying Tactics Unveiled Secret Files Used Against Five On Trial**

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They were perennially short of money and always nervous about being detected. But the small band of alleged Cuban spies deployed in South Florida showed striking determination to accomplish their intelligence missions and professed undying loyalty to Fidel Castro and his revolution.

This look at their lives comes from about 1,400 pages of records confiscated by the FBI from encrypted computer disks.

Spontaneity had very little place in the agents' very scripted days. They kept detailed financial reports, listing all expenses down to kitchen cleaners (\$6.88), haircuts (\$10) and roach repellents (\$6.75).

They memorized fake life stories, held clandestine meetings at Miami restaurants, worried greatly about shaking surveillance, and feared that the Internal Revenue Service would notice their unexplained incomes.

Their love lives suffered, too, because they feared that women would wonder why they used public phones - instead of home phones - to answer middle-of-the-night beeps.

One agent asked Havana if he should have a series of girlfriends so his neighbors would stop questioning his solo lifestyle.

The once-secret and encrypted reports from the agents to control officers in Havana, New York and Mexico City - and back - reveal the alleged tactics and techniques of Cuba's spies and their strategies to infiltrate the leading anti-Castro exile organizations in Miami, as well as military installations in South Florida.

Though the Cuban spy suspects sometimes have been portrayed as bumbling - they never managed to get hold of any classified U.S. secrets - the documents nevertheless paint a picture of disciplined covert-action officers trained in intelligence gathering.

Federal prosecutors released the documents last week in response to a court order obtained by The Herald and other news organizations. The documents are key evidence in the current Miami trial of five men arrested in 1998 as suspected Cuban spies - part of a larger spy ring known as La Red Avispa - the Wasp Network.

Five others accused of being spies pleaded guilty and are expected to testify against their former comrades.

The men on trial in U.S. District Court acknowledge working on orders from the Cuban government, but they deny gathering classified information or having the intent to harm U.S. interests.

Four other Wasp Network alumni managed to elude U.S. authorities and returned to Cuba, including Juan Pablo Roque, a former Brothers to the Rescue pilot who mysteriously vanished from Miami-Dade the day before a Cuban fighter plane shot down two Brothers planes on Feb. 24, 1996. Roque quickly resurfaced in Havana, saying he had been working for the Cuban government all along.

While the suspects were under surveillance by federal agents for at least four years before their 1998 arrests, they had blended into the community and quietly infiltrated at least two major exile groups - Brothers and Democracy Movement - and one military installation, the naval air station at Boca Chica near Key West.

They had fake names and code names with documents to match. Most also had elaborately concocted cover stories about their past.

Havana inserted them and four others - including Roque - as deep-cover moles in South Florida, according to the indictment.

Their assignment: to "penetrate" or burrow into the community, including the Cuban American National Foundation and key military sites such as the Southern Command, which oversees U.S. military activities in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Three men on trial - Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Lavanino and Fernando Gonzalez - acted as so-called illegal officers, or full-time intelligence operatives, prosecutors say. The two others - U.S.-born Rene Gonzalez and Antonio Guerrero - were "agents" who took directions from illegal officers but had no direct contact with Cuba, according to prosecutors.

The illegal agents reported to Havana by shortwave radio, beeper and computer messages. Occasionally, they would meet fellow spies assigned to Cuban diplomatic missions in New York and Mexico City, according to the records. The Cubans also used diplomatic pouches to move intelligence information.

The documents show that Gerardo Hernandez's journey from Havana to Miami began in February 1998, when Hernandez, posing as a Puerto Rican named Manuel Viramontez, traveled from Havana to Mexico City, where he acquired fake documents from Cuban agents. From Mexico City, Hernandez flew to Memphis, where a suspicious U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service airport inspector nearly caught him.

In the line for U.S. citizens, Hernandez presented a fake U.S. birth certificate showing he had been born in Cameron County, Texas, and a fake driver's license from Puerto Rico.

Patricia Mancha, an INS spokeswoman in Miami, said U.S. citizens can reenter

the United States with a birth certificate and a photo identification in case they don't have a passport.

The INS inspector demanded a passport, and when Hernandez said he didn't have one, the inspector pulled him out of the line for further questioning. The inspector ultimately returned the documents to Hernandez and let him go.

``You have to get a passport. It helps," the inspector said.

Havana was upset. Handlers there blamed Hernandez for the episode.

``You proceeded too defensively," Havana said.

Havana was angry, according to the messages, because covert-action experts there spend considerable time and money concocting cover stories for agents.

For example, a 31-page cover story for agents claiming to be Puerto Rican contained ``memories" of the ``homeland" in case someone questioned them closely about the island.

Hernandez, one of those accused of being ringleaders, also was one of the most descriptive in his reports. He faces the most serious charge: conspiracy to murder the four men who died in the Brothers to the Rescue shoot-down, by allegedly passing along to Havana the men's flight plans.

In one such report to Havana, he explained in detail how posing as a 30-year-old single man living by himself was beginning to raise eyebrows in his neighborhood.

``Some neighbors have commented to me that they find it strange that I, being a young man, apparently polite and with good characteristics, etc., live alone for so long," wrote Giraldo - a code name that prosecutors attribute to Hernandez.

Concerned that his neighbors' questions could blow his cover, Hernandez - who is married in Cuba - wondered whether Havana would prefer that he get a girlfriend or several girlfriends.

Being a spy, however, made dating difficult - particularly when he was required to keep rigorous radio contact with Havana in the mornings and evenings.

Hernandez ultimately discarded the notion of multiple girlfriends and proposed bringing his wife from Cuba instead.

Antonio Guerrero, an alleged spy known as Lorient, also worried about romantic relationships. Guerrero, born of Cuban parents in Miami and now 42 years old, reported from the Boca Chica Naval Air Station near Key West, where he worked as a janitor and watched for signs of a possible U.S. invasion of Cuba.

He also devoted considerable time to his difficult relationship with girlfriend Margaret Becker, a masseuse to whom the agent did not reveal his true identity.

Becker frequently nagged Guerrero to marry her.

`` She brings up the subject once in a while and I try to get out of it, as best as possible," Lorient wrote in one report.

Guerrero also worried about money, a problem that often plagued other agents.

While the agents lived in a world of capitalism, they never forgot their communist past. They often began their written reports with effusive revolutionary greetings.

Detection seemed the agents' constant fear. But while they took intricate precautions to elude surveillance, ultimately they failed.

For years prior to the arrests, federal agents had intercepted the agents' radio communications, occasionally entered their homes and apartments, and followed them.

CUBAN `SPIES' - OR CUBAN `PATRITOS'?

The five men on trial in federal court are accused of belonging to a Cuban spy ring called La Red Avispa, the Wasp Network. They used assorted fake names to cover their true identities, prosecutors charge, and tried to infiltrate U.S. military bases and Cuban exile groups to feed information to Havana.

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Caption: photo: Gerardo Hernandez, Ramon Lavanino, Rene Gonzalez, Antonio Guerrero, Fernando Gonzalez, Alejandro Alonso, Nilo Hernandez, Linda Hernandez, Joseph Santos, Amarylis Silverio Santos, Juan Pablo Roque, Ricardo Villareal, Remijio Luna (all-n)

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