

Testimony Offers Peek Into Spy Biz Defendants Accused Of Cuban Espionage

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Author: GAIL EPSTEIN NIEVES, gepstein@herald.com

Jurors got a primer in Spying 101 Monday as prosecutors called their first witnesses in the federal trial of five men accused of spying for the Cuban government.

Not exactly the stuff of James Bond but illuminating nonetheless, the testimony established that code names and secret passwords really are tools of the trade - not just for the Cubans on trial, but also for the FBI.

The accused, for instance, allegedly concealed thousands of pages of intelligence reports on encrypted computers disks. At first glance the disks looked empty.

But FBI Agent Vicente Rosado testified that he ferreted more than 3,000 pages from the disks by discovering the encryption program's hidden passwords: Afinacion. Cientifico. Fuerte. Mambi.

Translations: Tuning. Scientist. Strong. Cuban rebels in the Spanish-American War.

Rosado did not say why he thought those passwords were used. Jurors are scheduled to start reading some of those reports today.

The FBI, also concerned about secrecy, assigned code names to the defendants. Agents called suspected spymaster Gerardo Hernandez ``Royal Sovereign." Other men were called ``Candyman" and ``Rough Treatment." Again, no explanation was provided for the nicknames' meanings.

If secrecy was the goal of the accused spies, however, it was defeated long before the FBI went public on Sept. 12, 1998, agents sweeping through seven homes from Hollywood to Key West and arresting 10 Cubans targeted in a major counterespionage investigation.

Prosecutors allege that 14 ring members monitored U.S. military installations and Cuban exile groups in a bid to feed secrets to Fidel Castro. Hernandez, the lead defendant, also is accused of conspiring to commit murder in the shutdown of four Brothers to Rescue fliers.

The defense acknowledges that the men were working for the Cuban government, but denies that the men obtained classified information or intended to harm U.S. interests.

The FBI's Rosado said he is a computer specialist working with the agency's Foreign Counter-Intelligence squad on Cuba. Under direct examination by Assistant U.S. Attorney Caroline Heck Miller, Rosado said that for at least two years he made clandestine searches at homes of the people linked to the so-called La Red Avispa, or Wasp Network.

‘NO TRACE’

Rosado said his duties were ``to make sure no trace was left" of his presence as he

slipped inside four apartments, in Miami-Dade and Broward, on 10 occasions between Aug. 5, 1996, and April 26, 1998. He used a machine to copy the contents of some 814 computer disks found inside.

Sometimes, Rosado said, he wouldn't copy a disk if it looked like he couldn't easily return it to its original spot.

He gave no explanation of how he entered the apartments, or what precautions he might have taken to avoid being discovered.

He had federal court orders allowing the searches, he said.

Five of the searches were in Hernandez's North Miami Beach apartment. Rosado said he copied 507 disks there. One contained a report about Brothers to the Rescue and flotilla activities by the Democracy Movement, the agent said, not elaborating.

Rosado said he used a rented apartment across the street as "a base of operations" to watch the "comings and goings" of Hernandez and his associates. Agents found \$7,450 in cash in a shoe box in Hernandez's apartment when they made the arrests.

Hernandez is accused of passing to Cuban authorities the flight plan of Brothers to the Rescue, two of whose Cessnas were shot down by a Cuban MiG fighter on Feb. 24, 1996.

MORE TESTIMONY

Jurors also heard testimony about false identities assumed by three defendants. Relatives of three babies who died in California in 1966, 1967 and 1969 identified the deceased as Luis Medina III, Ruben Campa and Manuel Viramontez.

Both sides agree that those names, among others, were used by the defendants. Also on trial are Rene Gonzalez and Antonio Guerrero.

Five of the 14 people indicted in the case already pleaded guilty. The other four are believed to have fled to Cuba.

Phillip Horowitz, defense attorney for pilot Gonzalez, 44, told jurors that his Chicago-born client moved to Cuba with his family in the 1950s and returned to the United States in 1990.

Gonzalez flew planes for Brothers to the Rescue during the rafter crisis. He grew "frustrated" with exile politics, however, when leaders of the group PUND - Partido de Unidad Nacional Democratica, or Democratic Unity Party - allegedly asked him in 1995 to fly cocaine out of Honduras to help fund the group's "terrorist" anti-Cuba activities, the lawyer said.

So Gonzalez became an FBI informant, Horowitz said, meeting often with an agent who was secretly recording their conversations. A PUND leader was eventually convicted on drug charges, he said.

The government alleges that Gonzalez tried to "infiltrate" the FBI, but Horowitz called that idea "ludicrous." He said the FBI agent initiated most of the contacts, eager to exploit Gonzalez's contacts and have him do the FBI's "dirty work."

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