

Cuban Spy Indictment Charges Filed In Downing Of Exile Fliers Top Spy Planned Brothers Ambush

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The mastermind behind Cuba's ambush of two Brothers to the Rescue airplanes was "MX," the code name for the head of Havana's Directorate of Intelligence (DI), according to the indictment returned Friday by a Miami grand jury.

His agents in Miami, known as the Wasp Network, used beepers to signal each other, contacted a Cuban diplomat in the men's room of a restaurant and filed reports on U.S. military activities in South Florida, the indictment added.

The indictment offered an intriguing glimpse into DI activities and interests in Miami in connection with "Operation Scorpion" - the ambush of four Brothers pilots shot down and killed by Cuban MiGs on Feb. 24, 1996.

It also accused a top agent of the Wasp Network of conspiracy to commit murder. The DI captain, who has used fake U.S. passports in the name of Manuel Viramontes, was identified in the indictment as Gerardo Hernandez.

But the indictment also left some key questions unanswered:

* Why were no charges filed against Viramontes' supervisors in Havana, including the mysterious "MX"?

* Why were no charges filed against Cuban President Fidel Castro, who the indictment says visited "MX" twice in the week after the ambush to analyze "follow-up operations."

The indictment indicates the plot to ambush the Brothers pilots started around December 1995, when defendant Juan Pablo Roque was ordered by Havana to "urgently inform" on the activities of Brothers leader Jose Basulto.

Hernandez was told on Feb. 17 that "MX" had directed that none of his spies should fly with Brothers Feb. 24-27, the indictment said, apparently to safeguard them from the planned shootdowns.

By Feb. 22, 1996, the trap appeared to be in place, with DI officials in Havana reporting that a special agent had traveled to an undisclosed site to support Roque's escape after the trap was sprung.

Roque, a "defector" who had become friends with Basulto, disappeared on Feb. 23. While initial media reports had him returning to Cuba via the Bahamas, the indictment says he escaped through Mexico, long a base for Cuban intelligence operations.

One of the accused spies had a Mexican driver's license, and two of the accused who traveled back to Cuba to receive new orders appear to have done so through Mexico, according to the indictment.

The indictment also charged that the Cuban spies used beepers to message each other, and were under orders to use a special code in "an emergency indicating a U.S. military threat being planned against Cuba."

The spy network appeared to have been primarily assigned to report on Cuban exiles in Miami while provoking and encouraging differences within the exile community, the indictment said.

But the agents were also tasked with "influencing U.S. public and private institutions, including law enforcement and political entities," the document added.

Their work included sending letters to The Miami Herald portraying the writers as Cuban-American moderates and attacking exile community leaders like Jorge Mas Canosa, the late founder of the Cuban American National Foundation, law enforcement officials said.

The indictment also indicated that the alleged Cuban agents had apparently spent more time spying on U.S. military installations than previously thought.

Defendant Antonio Guerrero filed two reports on the Boca Chica Naval Air Station in Key West, describing planes and their takeoff and landing times, as well as the home addresses of some officers, the indictment said.

Joseph and Amarylis Santos filed at least one "detailed" report on the Miami-based U.S. Southern Command and were under orders to try to obtain jobs at the complex, which controls U.S. military activities in Latin America.

And defendant Rene Gonzalez, a pilot with the exile Democracy Movement, reported he had flown close to the Homestead air base to report on activities there.

One unidentified member of the Wasp Network met on April 14, 1998, with a Cuban diplomat - apparently attached to the Cuban mission to the United Nations - in the men's room of a Wendy's in Nassau County, New York, the indictment added

Although the indictment did not identify the mysterious "MX," the post of chief of the Directorate of Intelligence is usually held by a deputy minister in the Ministry of Interior, which handles Cuba's internal security.

The staff at the DI, formerly known as the DGI, was heavily purged after the 1989 trial and execution of Gen. Arnaldo Ochoa and several Interior Ministry intelligence operatives on charges of drug smuggling.

Gen. Jesus Bermudez Cutino, then head of army intelligence, was named to head DI but was transferred back to military intelligence in 1995, several Cuban armed forces defectors in Miami said.

The identity of Bermudez's replacement was not immediately available.

photo: Mario de la Pena, Pablo Morales, Carlos Costa, Armando

Alejandro Jr. (all-a)

VICTIMS OF CASTRO REGIME: Brothers to the Rescue volunteer fliers Mario de la Pena, Pablo Morales, Carlos Costa and Armando Alejandro Jr. were shot down by Cuban MiGs on Feb. 24, 1996.

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Section: Front

Page: 1A

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