

# **U.S. turns over tapes of Brothers downing; Raul Castro may have spoken to jet pilots**

**The Miami Herald, Friday, May 10, 1996, page 16-A  
PABLO ALFONSO**

Two months after demanding at the United Nations a swift investigation of the downing of two U.S.-registered planes by Cuban warplanes, the United States on Thursday turned over recordings of the communications between the warplanes and their controllers to the International Civil Aeronautics Organization (ICAO) in Montreal.

Sources familiar with the investigation told The Herald that U.S. authorities may have tried to conceal the direct participation of Defense Minister Raul Castro in Cuba's Feb. 24 downing of the civilian aircraft over the Florida Straits. Four pilots of the volunteer group Brothers to the Rescue died in the incident.

The sources did not say what the U.S. motive was for trying to conceal Castro's role.

"We have been told in confidence by U.S. intelligence sources that the voice of Raul Castro is heard on those tapes," said Jose Basulto, president of Brothers to the Rescue.

Basulto's allegation about Castro's participation in the shoot-down coincides with statements made to The Herald by a diplomatic source close to the investigation, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

According to Herald sources, one of the tapes contains a passage where a voice joins the pilot-to-control dialogue and orders emphatically that the Cessnas be shot down. The voice appears to be that of a high-ranking officer, the sources said.

A transcript of the tapes was made public in February by the State Department.

The White House is unsure as to the identity of the officer who gave the order, said a government official who declined to be identified. That was one reason, he said, why intelligence experts clashed on the advisability of releasing the full, unedited tapes.

Rep. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., said a member of the National Security Council told him intelligence officials were not sure whether the order came from the Cuban defense chief.

"They are not certain that the voice was that of Raul Castro," Menendez said.

U.S. intelligence sources said the delay in releasing the recordings was caused by internal debate over whether the tapes would reveal U.S. capabilities for electronic surveillance of Cuba's airwaves.

Ron Schleede, a member of the U.S. team that delivered the tapes, declined to comment Thursday, saying he was "not empowered to deal with any matter connected with the investigation."

On April 30, Fidel Castro told CBS News that he did not give a specific order on Feb. 24 to shoot down the planes and neither did Raul Castro. But he said he had given general orders that violations of Cuban airspace should be stopped.

Two former high-ranking officials of Cuba's air force, who defected to the United States, said that it was likely that Raul Castro had a direct role in the shoot-down.

"Even if an action plan had been approved in advance, it's almost certain that Raul Castro was notified before (the shooting) took place," said Maj. Orestes Lorenzo.

Gen. Rafael del Pino said Cuba's leadership is apparently trying to distance itself from any responsibility in the attack, which created a wave of international repudiation.

Edition: FINAL  
Section: FRONT  
Page: 16-A