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U.S. Shadow Warriors & Origins Of Contragate: Contragate's Second Secret Team — The Cuban "s- force" (part 4 Of 6)

by Deborah Tyroler

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Editor's Note: The American "secret team" behind the illegal contra supply operation has long had a shadow arm a second "secret team" of Cuban exiles and Bay of Pigs veterans who played key roles in Watergate and financed their activities through drug operations and support from right-wing governments. Pacific News Service contributing editor Peter Dale Scott, former Canadian diplomat and veteran researcher of US covert politics, is author of "The War Conspiracy" and "The Assassinations." [The Latin America Data Base (LADB) has received permission from PNS to reproduce this six-part series.] By Peter Dale Scott The Iran-contra arms scandal is bit by bit revealing the key role of an American private special warfare "secret team." But working with that team for years has been a second, even more shadowy secret team a close-knit band of Cuban exiles. The Cubans' work for their American handlers has included assassination efforts, major terrorist operations, and the famous Watergate burglaries under President Nixon. Some members were arrested in 1970 in the Justice Department's Operation Eagle, which was announced as the largest federal narcotics enforcement operation ever up to that time. A recent suit brought by the nonprofit Christic Institute alleges that the Cuban team, in conjunction with its US intelligence allies, also looked to the narcotics traffic to pay for its contra operations. The political goal of the Cuban secret team has always been the overthrow of Fidel Castro, a fact that has made their priorities different at times from those of any American president, Democrat or Republican. This explains why so many in the Cuban team have turned for support to other right-wing governments like Argentina and Chile, whose own international intelligence operations have been financed by narcotics traffic. Today, the two most prominent members of the Cuban team are the Cubans in charge of loading the ill-fated Hasenfus supply plane at the Ilopango air base in El Salvador: Felix Rodriguez and Luis Posada. But they are working in the contra supply operation with other ex-CIA Cubans, who have been recruited through the Bay of Pigs veterans' association known as Brigade 2506. Brigade President Juan Perez-Franco, who in 1985 made Brigade support for the contras official, a decade earlier paved the way for the Brigade's entrance into CORU, a Cuban exile terrorist alliance supported by the military governments of Chile and Argentina. CORU was funded by the Miami-based World Finance Corporation, set up in 1971 by Brigade 2506 veteran Guillermo Hernandez Cartaya. The House Select Committee on Narcotics Abuse and Control found that WFC's activities included "political corruption, gunrunning, as well as narcotics trafficking on an international level." For example, Duney Perez Alamo, a WFC employee and former CIA agent, was also an admitted CORU member. His friend Gaspar Jimenez was arrested in 1976 for a CORU attempted kidnap and murder in Merida, Mexico. According to the Miami Organized Crime Bureau, "Hernandez Cartaya financed and planned the Mexican action, with help from Perez Alamo." In March, 1977, Jimenez escaped from a Mexican prison apparently with the aid of \$50,000 supplied by WFC. In her book, "In Banks We Trust," author Penny Lernoux identifies one of those who aided in the escape as Nestor "Tony" Izquierdo, a Cuban exile formerly associated with the Defense Intelligence Agency. Arrested while attempting to reenter the United States from Mexico,

Izquierdo's bond and legal fees were paid by the WFC. Like Rodriguez and Posada, Perez Alamo and Izquierdo were no average veterans of Brigade 2506, but members of a much smaller elite of specialists trained in sabotage and other black arts. At least three members of this inner elite, or "S-Force," also were in touch with the renegade ex-CIA agent Ed Wilson. Members of this smaller "S-Force" have been used for illegal purposes from at least 1971, when Howard Hunt attended the Brigade's tenth anniversary meeting to recruit some of the future Watergate burglars for the Nixon White House "plumbers" or "counterintelligence" break-in teams. Hunt, seeking break-in specialists, went to the elite counterintelligence operation of the CIA's Miami station. Most of these 150 or so men were Bay of Pigs veterans who had subsequently undergone further army training at Fort Jackson; others, like Rodriguez and Posada, had been sent for officer training at Fort Benning. Some of this elite were then recruited to work for the CIA. This counterintelligence operation, known as Operation 40, had to be closed down in the early 1970s, after one of its planes crashed in Southern California with several kilos of cocaine and heroin aboard. Both Rodriguez and Posada have been identified as Operation 40 members, while the Fort Jackson trainees formed their own veterans' organization, the "Ex- Combatientes de Fort Jackson." Among those who took part in Hunt's first Watergate break-in, and were never arrested, were Angel Ferrer, the president of the Ex-Combatientes, and Felipe de Diego, identified in Watergate testimony as a member of Operation 40. Another Operation 40 member who was arrested in the June 17, 1972, Watergate break-in along with his American handlers Howard Hunt and James McCord was Eugenio Martinez, who was on the CIA payroll at the time. In 1981, Martinez was pardoned by President-elect Ronald Reagan. It was these men from the special advance sabotage force, or "S-Force," who had the most intimate and conspiratorial relationship with the American shadow network behind Contragate. "Sabotage" is perhaps a euphemism for the range of tasks this "S-Force" was trained for, as opposed to the larger "Ex- Combatientes de Fort Jackson," and still larger Brigade 2506. The most important of these tasks was the assassination of Fidel Castro. Business Week has identified Rafael "Chi Chi" Quintero, a member of the contra supply team at Ilopango and earlier one of the key "S-Force" infiltrators into Cuba, as a man "who played a key role in the Bay of Pigs invasion and in subsequent efforts to assassinate Fidel Castro." Richard Nixon learned to his regret the dangers of hiring Cubans with their own hardline political agenda in order to bypass both the CIA and Congress. It may be that Ronald Reagan is about to learn the same lesson. [Parts 1 and 2 of this series appeared in the 02/27/87 issue of CAU. Part 3 appears in this issue, and parts 5 and 6 will be published in the 03/06/87 issue of CAU.]

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