

Argosy Interview: Gerry Hemming

Gerry Patrick Hemming has come in from the cold. Last year, this former mercenary and CIA contract agent (now a Miami private investigator) came to Senate investigators with perhaps the most remarkable revelations ever offered about the CIA's hits, plots and plans. Now, in an exclusive ARGOSY interview, he has agreed to elaborate:

- The assassination of John F. Kennedy was discussed and planned—with cash on the line—by a number of organized groups in 1963. As many as two dozen offers were made to Hemming's private mercenary army of anti-Castro Cuban exiles, the International Penetration Force (Interpen).

- A group of anti-Castro Cubans in Florida, which worked in close harmony with the CIA, made plans in 1970 to fire a missile at Richard Nixon's Key Biscayne presidential compound and make it appear to be an attack made by Castro.

- There were plans conceived in high government circles to foment terror at the 1972 Miami conventions by placing automatic weapons in the hands of extremist left-wing and right-wing groups. Frank Sturgis, of the White House Plumbers unit, apparently played a role in the attempt to obtain the weapons.

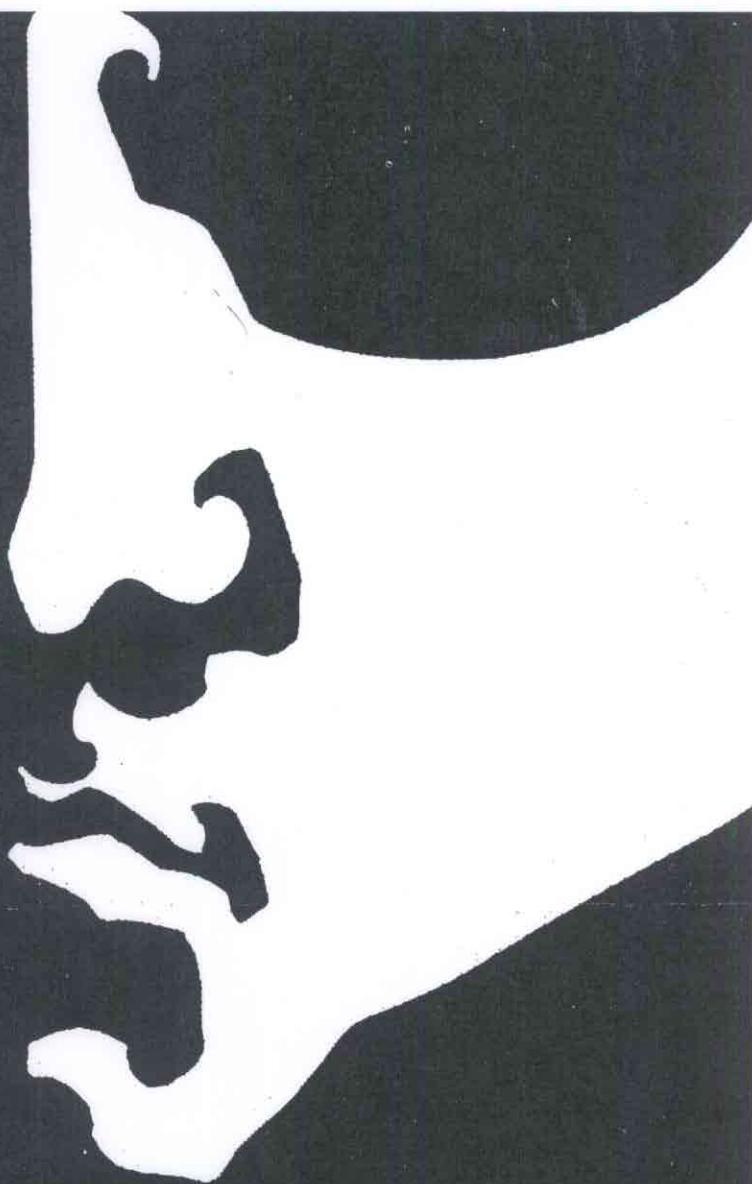
- A team of anti-Castro Cuban exile naval commandos, used in many CIA operations, fired upon and severely damaged a Spanish ship in 1964 when they mistook it for the Castro vessel that the CIA had assigned them to sink.

- During the 1960s, Howard Hughes' organization kept on financial retainer a Cuban exile organization which attempted to carry out the assassination of Fidel Castro. A Hughes-leased Bahamian island was also used as an anti-Castro base of operations.

Hemming, a six-foot-six ex-Marine and Green Beret who knew personally Lee Harvey Oswald, Fidel Castro, Frank Sturgis and Che Guevara, has also identified several of the "hit men" code-named in the Senate's report on CIA-attempted assassinations of foreign leaders; discussed the maverick operation of Florida CIA contract employees in forming proprietary companies to launder money for Latin American assassinations and analyzed the Mob's attempt to infiltrate the White House during the Kennedy years.

The odyssey of Gerry Hemming began in the mountains of Cuba where, like many other adventurers in the days before Castro turned to the Communists, he came to aid Fidel's rebels in their efforts to overthrow the corrupt Fulgencio Batista. Eventually, he was assigned by Castro to work as an officer-instructor of a parachute regiment, later as adjutant at a Cuban air base. By this time, he was really working against Castro for

By Dick Russell



An EX-CIA Man's Stunning Revelations On "The Company," JFK's Murder, And The Plot To Kill Richard Nixon

American intelligence. In the fall of 1960, discovered by Fidel and facing possible execution, he escaped.

After contacting the CIA to tell them all he knew about Castro's operations, Hemming settled in Florida. There he started Interpen, a specialized group that trained embittered Cuban exiles in special Florida camps for long-range penetration and guerrilla warfare against Castro's regime. He maintained a cadre of twenty-five instructors. And he began a long friendly-adversary relationship with the CIA, the Mob, the Hughes interests, Congress, and many wealthy and influential Americans.

For the last ten years, since Interpen disbanded in 1964, Hemming has worked for a NASA project in Africa; as a paid investigator on Jim Garrison's staff looking into the Kennedy assassination; and as part of a paramedic team that rescued survivors in the 1970 Peruvian earthquake.

Gerry Hemming was around for the tumult and the shouting, the hits and the misses. He was an insider who knew most of the secrets and the locations of the skeletons in the closet. Concerned that America may be drifting perilously close to a Gestapo-type state of mind, he has decided to talk.

ARGOSY: You've told Senate investigators that 1963 marked a startling change in your liaisons with certain groups and certain wealthy American citizens. And this change finally led to the dissolution of your group, the International Penetration Force. Could you elaborate on what happened then?

HEMMING: There were a helluva lot of weird things going on. We'd begun to encounter more and more organizations of people in different cities with one thing on their mind—initially, taking care of Castro and then doing something about the other "problem," that "guy" in the White House. You couldn't walk down the street without running into some kind

of conspiracy. I don't doubt that there are a dozen people out there that are sure they are the ones who financed the Dallas job on Kennedy.

ARGOSY: Were offers to assassinate Kennedy actually made to you and your group?

HEMMING: Rather frequently.

ARGOSY: How many?

HEMMING: More than two dozen, by organized elements that had financial backing within the United States.

ARGOSY: What kind of elements? The right wing? Minutemen types?

HEMMING: There might be a retired armed forces type, a guy from the Klan. These would only be casual conversations. When it came time to open up the attache case with the money in it, it was usually a mixed group.

ARGOSY: You actually saw money on the line?

HEMMING: Oh yeah, more than once. Some of the cheapos talked about \$100,000; one said they'd pay a million.

ARGOSY: So what did you do?

HEMMING: About that point, we would gracefully back out of it. Then we would later find out that they were trying to recruit our Cuban contacts for the same purpose.

ARGOSY: Do you think it's possible that the Kennedy killing involved some of the Cuban exile community?

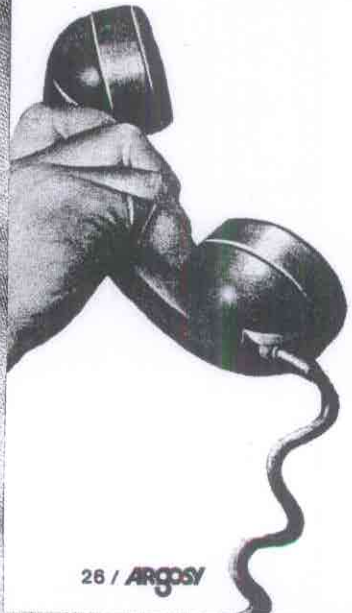
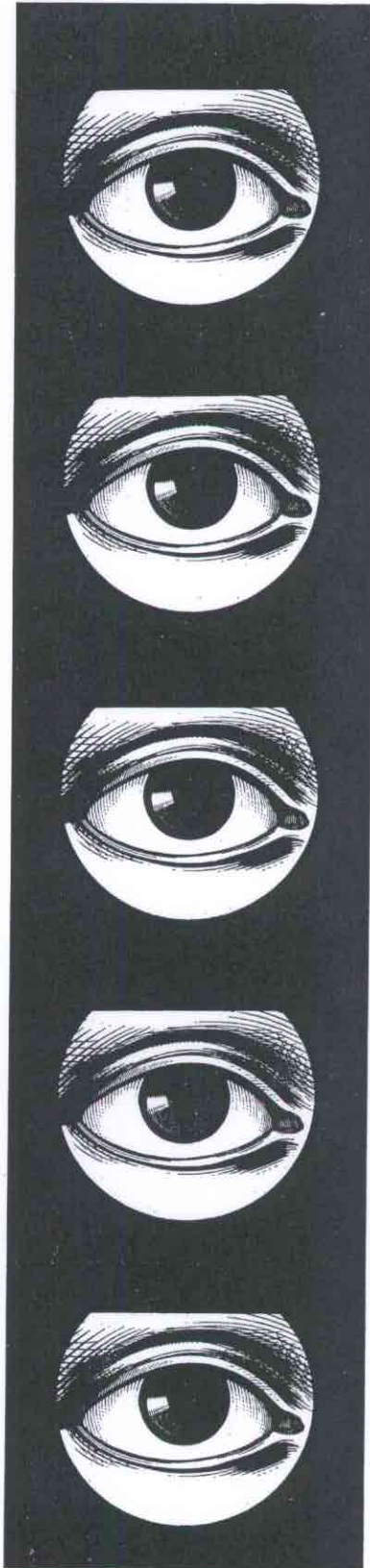
HEMMING: Yes, very possible. It wasn't that hard a job. I've seen and been on the scene for harder jobs than what happened in Dealey Plaza. You had a hard core of characters in the Dallas Police and County Sheriff's Department that would blow somebody's head off at a whisper. When you've got people running around who have friendships with organized crime, Federal agencies, and have been in bed with so many people—well, when the assassination goes down, everybody's covering their tracks.

ARGOSY: Can you be specific about the offers you received to kill Kennedy?

HEMMING: Look, there are people who didn't have a goddamn thing to do with it, but they think they did because they were conned by other people. If they think somebody's gonna point the finger at them, they're gonna get 'em. And I'd like to stay alive.

ARGOSY: You told the Senate investigators that you believed in 1963 that Loran [Lorenzo] Hall was somehow involved. [Hall, an ex-CIA contract employee, right-wing politico and trainer of Cuban exiles for a Cuban invasion, was named by the Warren Commission as one of three men who may have been in Dallas with Lee Harvey Oswald in September 1963.]

HEMMING: Yes, the day of the assassination, I made a call to Texas from Miami. And I pointedly asked, is Lorenzo Hall in Dallas? I made the call about 1:30 or 2:00 in the afternoon. He was there. My



contact had seen him in Dallas the day before.

ARGOSY: Why were you suspicious of Lorenzo Hall?

HEMMING: Because he left Miami with the stated intent to get Kennedy. And he had my weapon, a Johnson 30.06 breakdown rifle with a scope on it that had been prepared for the Bay of Pigs. I'd left it with a private investigator who had previously worked under Agency [CIA] auspices on the West Coast. Hall got the weapon when we ran short of funds on a return trip from L.A. to Florida, and we ended up using Hall's car.

ARGOSY: You were working closely with Hall?

HEMMING: He came out to work with our group in 1963. Then he ran afoul with some people, and immediately went to work with a group that I thought was infiltrated by Castro's agents. Hall ignored this. He siphoned off a couple of people who had worked with me in the past, and started organizing his own operation with [Frank] Sturgis and some other guys.

ARGOSY: Hall left Miami again shortly before the assassination? Could you be more specific about his plans?

HEMMING: He was gonna stop and look up a number of people. Some he'd met through me, others when he was in Cuba in 1959. One was Santo Trafficante's brother in St. Pete, and some others who operated under Meyer Lansky's auspices. [Lansky is the boss of the National Crime Syndicate.] And there were still other connections in Louisiana and Texas that had expressed an interest.

ARGOSY: In eliminating Kennedy?

HEMMING: Yes.

ARGOSY: And you believe Hall was directly involved...?

HEMMING: He knew how to do the job. We'd discussed various techniques as part of our schooling—techniques required for Havana, Port-au-Prince and other Latin American jobs. But I think somebody was trying to put him there [Dallas] so he'd be one of the patsies.

ARGOSY: You've said you believe Oswald was a patsy. Did you ever have contact with Oswald?

HEMMING: I ran into Oswald in Los Angeles in 1959, when he showed up at the Cuban Consulate. The coordinator of the 26th of July Movement [a Cuban organization] called me aside and said a Marine officer had showed up, intimating that he was prepared to desert and go to Cuba to become a revolutionary. I met with the Marine and he told me he was a noncommissioned officer. He talked about being a radar operator and helping the Cubans out with everything he knew. He turned out to be Oswald.

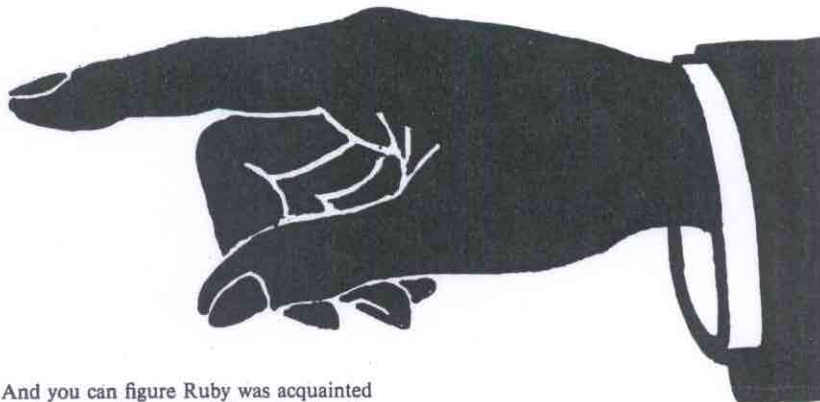
ARGOSY: What was your impression of him? Was he sincere?

HEMMING: I thought he was a penetrator [of pro-Castro forces]. I told the 26th of July leadership to get rid of him. I

thought he was on the Naval Intelligence payroll at the time.

ARGOSY: What about Jack Ruby? Did you know of him? Supposedly he'd been involved in Cuban gunrunning and smuggling operations...

HEMMING: From what I understand, Ruby was around way back in 1947 when Claude Adderley—the Hiroshima pilot—got involved in a plan to bomb Havana. He also had a connection to an intelligence-Mob type in Mexico who was running the operation. They all got hauled into Federal court, arms and equipment were confiscated, and someone told me that Ruby had some kind of involvement.



And you can figure Ruby was acquainted with some of the people involved in the Kennedy operation in Shreveport, New Orleans, and Texas. He worked with the Chicago mob and some Pittsburgh boys, and was in good with the Lansky people down in Havana.

ARGOSY: So you see a definite role for organized crime in the picture?

HEMMING: Look, going back to things concerning the overthrow of Batista in 1958, the Mob was trying to get their boys into Cuba—Sturgis, Johnny Devereux, Jack Cannon, Herman Marx. They wanted people on both sides [with Batista and with Castro]. Later they operated the same way, trying to do the hits against Fidel through 1959 and 1960.

ARGOSY: The Mob was actually pulling those kinds of things in Cuba before the CIA's attempts on Castro's life?

HEMMING: Well, let's say they all know one another. They get along. Quite a few of the people who had worked for the Agency and had gotten into a little trouble, went to work for people that knew Mob people or [Howard] Hughes people. Everybody gets to know everybody else. And Castro was getting tired of the attempts on his life. And finally I think some of Fidel's boys had people in Mexico monitoring the JFK thing in 1963. Their presence was indicated.

ARGOSY: You mean that Castro might also have been involved in the Kennedy assassination?

HEMMING: Consider that Castro was faced with all these CIA-Mob hits; a lot of people were coming down on him. At a lower echelon, people in his own circle, wanting to do the "big guy" a favor, might've taken things into their own hands. I don't see Castro himself directing the thing. It could've been like Jeb Magruder and Gordon Liddy in Watergate—you know, "we've got to get rid of this Jack Anderson," so away Liddy goes with a grenade in his hand. The thing is, you had so many people planning the Kennedy thing, it was bound to come.

ARGOSY: Could one motivation have been to try to pin the blame on Castro in

order to justify an immediate invasion of Cuba?

HEMMING: There are people crazy enough to think that that would be the outcome. If there had been enough fingers pointed in Castro's direction, Lyndon Johnson might've struck out at Havana in the belief that it was a KGB [Russian intelligence]-Castro operation.

ARGOSY: Last year, you told Senate investigators about a similar situation in 1970 when you discussed a plot by some anti-Castro Cuban exiles in Miami—who worked closely with the CIA—to fire a missile at Richard Nixon's Florida presidential compound and make it look like a Castro-planned operation. Could you tell us what that was all about?

HEMMING: That was in the fall of 1970. Let me give you a little background. This particular group of exiles was working on a commodities exchange operation out of Florida. There's a tremendous shortage of commodities inside Cuba—coffee, flour, you name it. So the original intent was to compromise some of Castro's Cuban army types by getting them a few goodies now and then. There were a number of fishing boats moving out from Florida and taking commodities down there—primarily ice, lard, used clothing, used shoes, and things like that.

One thing led to another, and one of

the exile groups got absorbed by the CIA. The CIA started using this operation for getting agents in and out of Cuba. In many cases they were even going inside small Cuban ports, escorted by Castro's PT boats. They'd make their trades and pick up lobster. They could insert agents into Cuba that way as long as they didn't harm that particular territory. They got a tremendous amount of cooperation in the ports, so long as they weren't going in for a commando operation, because everybody was making a lot of money on this commodities racket.

About this time, one of my contacts got into the thing. And before long, this group starts talking in Miami about having the full cooperation of some Castro military types who were about to be issued a Russian Ossa patrol vessel, the kind that carries the Styx missiles. They said they also had contacts with some SAM [Strategic Air Missile] site people inside Cuba with Castro's Air Force artillery. And the exiles were going to use those people by putting together a simultaneous plan. First, one of the SAMs would "accidentally" hit one of the aircraft heading into the U.S. base at Guantanamo and at the same time, the presidential compound on Bay Line in Key Biscayne would get hit with a couple of Styx missiles.

Their patrol boat would innocently be three or four miles out to sea—very easily identifiable with Cuban markings. They were gonna make sure to hit the compound when Nixon was in town. Maybe they'd wait until he stepped out in his helicopter. I don't know what the coordination was. I didn't get that close to it. But my impression was that there wouldn't be any survivors in the presidential compound.

ARGOSY: And these exiles were working for the CIA?

HEMMING: Yes, they were monitored by the CIA.

ARGOSY: Was it specifically an assassination plot against Nixon?

HEMMING: It could have turned into one. The people involved knew they were risking that among the fatalities could be Richard M. Nixon. There wasn't any personal animosity against Nixon. But it didn't bother them in the least if it had to go that way. It was designed as a provocation. And what do you think Spiro Agnew would have done about six hours later, thinking it was a Castro operation?

ARGOSY: So the plan was immediate retaliation against Cuba by the U.S. government. . . .

HEMMING: This was the group's thinking. They planned to have some "loyal" Castro types on board in the patrol boat, the ones they'd contacted through the commodities operation, and then the planners behind the *real* operation would leave the boat. I imagine they were gonna do something to the boat, or allow something to be done. Then they

were gonna get all their people out of Florida. They'd already acquired two aircraft for that purpose. And they were spending money.

I hesitate to say who knew about it or approved it. But the thing was ongoing, and being monitored by the CIA.

ARGOSY: What happened to stop it?

HEMMING: Through my contact in the group, they approached me to get them a pilot and backup aircraft to get them the hell out of Florida when the operation went down. So I took a little trip with my contact to see the local Secret Service and we told 'em the story. There was a *big* flap about it, involving the Army and Navy and everybody. But the CIA or Customs—or maybe both—put together a "personality memo" knocking me, and gave it to the Secret Service. Then a call comes from the Washington Secret Service, telling Joseph Gasquez of their Miami bureau that the Army and Navy are on their ass. The guy wanted Gasquez to quit meddling around. Gasquez says, "These people are plotting to kill the President of the United States! They've got the weapons and the capability!" And Washington says, "Drop it." Gasquez had brought in some people to set up an illegal buy of automatic weapons and explosives by the conspirators, so there'd be an excuse to arrest them.

About ten days went by. Then Gasquez gets a hold of me and says, "Don't worry, the CIA says they have it wired in." Well, of course they had it wired in—the guy leading the exile group had been in touch with the CIA continuously. But now the CIA wanted *my* contact out of the picture. I didn't go along with it. A few days later, a Customs and an FBI agent approached the group where they had anchored a fishing boat off the Flagler Street Bridge in Miami. The FBI said pointedly, "We have information that you're smuggling automatic weapons," and glanced over at my man standing a few feet away. They were trying to burn him, get him killed as an informer.

Anyway, the missile operation was blown. Whatever they were planning, they couldn't do it after all this. I doubt if they actually could've gotten an Ossa boat or Styx missiles. If anything, they'd probably have been able to bring in a P-4 boat with a 3720-mm cannon on it. But this wasn't the end of it. About three days after the FBI tried to burn my contact, he told me what happened when Bebe Rebozo's houseboat started coming up the Miami River with the president on board.

ARGOSY: What was that?

HEMMING: First of all, the Secret Service had been told by the CIA to stop any surveillance on the exiles' fishing boat. The Agency said they had everything under control, and that what I'd said [about the "accidental" missile attack] was all bullshit. So the Secret Service, instead of standing on that goddamn exile

boat whenever Nixon decided to take a cruise, pulled back. Nobody'd taken any precautions.

So here comes the president up the river [on Rebozo's boat], passing right by this boat full of exiles. There was an exchange of greetings in Spanish, and the *Coco Lobo* [Rebozo's boat] pulled over so they could all shake hands! Those Cubans were drunk and there were automatic carbines lying on the bunks within six feet of the president. All you needed was one guy who wasn't in on the whole plan to say, "Okay, here I go," [take gun in hand] and spray the houseboat. There were Secret Servicemen on board the houseboat, of course, but no deeper surveillance.

ARGOSY: But no incident occurred?

HEMMING: No. They exchanged greetings and the boats continued on up the river. It was ironic that they'd come together at this point. I don't know that Nixon was in any real danger, but the potential was there. When I told Gasquez of the Secret Service about this, he nearly hemorrhaged.

ARGOSY: What happened to the exile group?

HEMMING: They're still in business. They shifted over to Chilean operations. This same group set up hits in 1971 against Fidel in Antofagasta and Santiago, Chile, also in Lima, Peru. The attempt was heavily financed and might have involved Howard Hunt and some other people. In Chile, I know a guy who carried a camera with a built-in gun, but he chickened out about six feet away from Fidel at the last minute. In Lima, they had an aircraft waiting with a large 20-mm cannon in the door, waiting for Fidel to fly in. But Castro's plane pulled in with the door on the wrong side, and the American piloting the "hit" plane wouldn't move it down to a spot from which they could take a shot. They were going to try something in Bogota after that, with a pilot trying to knock down Castro's plane, but something else went wrong.

ARGOSY: Was the incident in Key Biscayne unusual? Surely it wasn't the kind of thing that happened regularly?

HEMMING: It was just one page in a big book. I think there was quite a package prepared.

ARGOSY: But by whom?

HEMMING: Who the hell *could* it be? You've got enough factions, it could be anybody. Everybody's had their little private CIAs for years—organized crime people, Hughes people, not to mention Nixon's own little government within a government.

ARGOSY: You told the Senate another bizarre story about Frank Sturgis trying to work out some kind of deal to obtain automatic weapons to disrupt the 1972 Republican and Democratic Presidential conventions.

HEMMING: This started when a former

continued on page 52

really a mezcal plant, and the only mezcal that gives authentic tequila is the blue mezcal grown in the hot, volcanic soil of the town called Tequila.

In this very high, hot country the mezcal plants take between eight and ten years to flower. Just before the plant shoots up to flower, there is a fantastic surge of juices in the core of the plant—called *cabeza* or *pina*. And this is harvest time. The plants grow in rows, looking like huge pineapples sticking out of the ground. A plant that is ready to flower can have a *pina* that weighs anywhere from 40 to 250 pounds and is filled with juice.

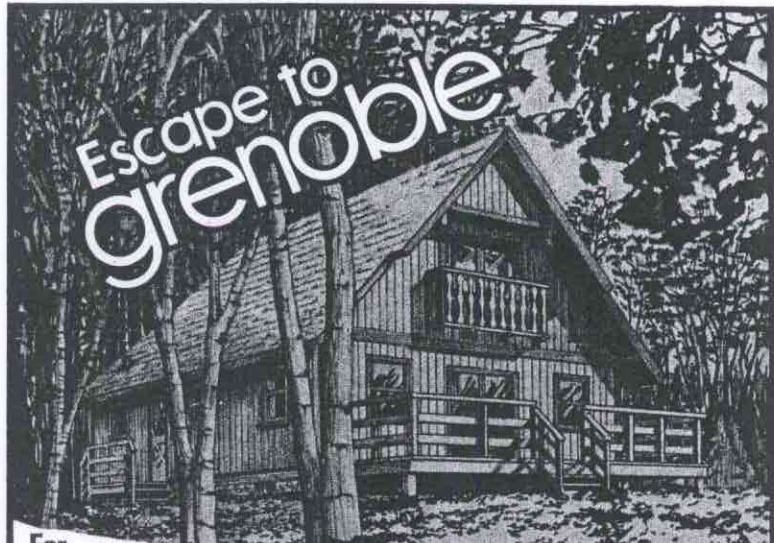
The *jimadores* (harvesters) begin their work long before the sun is up and burning hot. A good harvester can not only cut down 100 plants, but can also trim them of their leaves and shoots. The hearts are taken from the field and brought to the distillery where they are baked in pressurized ovens at a low temperature, until they are soft and brown. This takes about nine hours.

After a day of cooling, the hearts are crushed and shredded in order to extract all the juices, which then are collected in huge tanks. The sweet juice—called honeywater or *aquamiel*—is left to settle in the tanks until it looks like melted butterscotch. Not much later, a “starter” is added from an earlier batch of tequila and the juice begins to ferment. The fermentation is swift and sure—usually taking about three or four days. Once fermentation is over, it’s ready to be distilled.

Tequila is distilled in pot stills—small stills somewhat similar to those used to distill cognac. They hold between 200 to 300 gallons at a time. Most tequila is distilled twice. The “head” (that part of the distillate that comes through first) and the “tail” (that part of the distillate that comes through last) of each distillation are removed. The proof of the tequila, at this point, is a powerful 110. Depending on what end result is desired, it is either piped to lined tanks or to oak barrels. If it is to be a white tequila—the most popular—it is usually aged in lined or stainless-steel tanks for about three or four months. Most times, however, it is bottled immediately, and its proof is reduced by adding distilled water before it goes on its way to market.

If the tequila is to be a gold (*anejo*) tequila, it is piped into oak casks and left to age for two or three years. Sauza Commemorative is a six-year-old tequila. It is almost like a brandy, and is just as expensive.

Colorless, potent, and with a sweet smell, tequila is great, whether you drink it in the traditional Mexican way or in a newfangled *gringo* way. If you strive for the *authentic*, you must drink it straight with salt and lime. Pour out a shot, then moisten the area between your thumb



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and forefinger and sprinkle it with salt. Hold a wedge of lime between your thumb and forefinger and the shot glass in your other hand. The order of tasting the salt, lime and tequila is now up to you—lick the salt, pop the tequila, suck on the lime. Try any variation you like, but I guarantee you’ll like it.

If you find that method a little difficult to pursue at a formal dinner party or at some strange bar, try mixing your tequila. It mixes well and, like all other spirits, there’s a classic cocktail that immediately comes to mind when you mention tequila’s name—the Margarita. Before I give you this recipe and one or two others, let me give you a hint or two about using tequila in a cocktail. Make sure everything you’re using for mixing drinks is freezer-cold, including your glasses. Perform all the functions (stirring, pouring, etc.) as quickly as possible.

MARGARITA

2 oz. tequila
1 tablespoon Triple Sec
2 teaspoons lime juice
Salt
1 lime

Moisten the rims of your cocktail glasses with a wedge of lime and then spin them in a dish of salt. Refrigerate the glasses. Stir together the tequila, Triple Sec, and lime juice. Pour into the salt-lined glasses.

SUNRISE

2 oz. tequila
4 oz. orange juice
Dash grenadine

Pour grenadine on the bottom of a tall glass. Fill with ice cubes. Slowly add the tequila and orange juice. The effect, without stirring or mixing, is that of a sunrise.

And now for my favorite:

BLOODY MARIA

2 oz. tequila
1 small can Snappy-Tom Cocktail

In a tall glass filled with ice cubes, add the tequila to the Snappy-Tom. Garnish with a wedge of lime.

For more recipes using tequila, write to me in care of ARGOSY. Make sure you enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope to insure a prompt response. ■

associate of mine and I got together with some other people in the firearms business, people who were legally manufacturing automatic weapons with silencers, under government license in Georgia. We set up a Miami corporation called Parabellum, licensed for demonstrations and sales to the Latin American market. By early 1972, we were also talking with law-enforcement agencies about their acquiring some SWAT-type weapons, counterterror equipment, through our firm. A little bit prior to this, I'd been called by a local FBI agent who had asked me to do a favor for a friend of Sturgis. This aroused my curiosity somewhat. The next thing I hear is that Sturgis is running around to law-enforcement people giving them the same exact [sales] spiel I was! I figured, at first, that he was trying to cut into our market or something. He was fumbling around with chiefs of police in little Florida towns, making promises to get them automatic weapons in return for getting a bunch of *his* people [I] ded as law enforcement people—reserve officers, deputies—so *they* could carry the same weapons. Then I picked up on a couple of right-wing types talking about how they had a lot of automatic weapons, and when the political conventions came down to Miami . . . well, this started smelling a little bit funny.

I had no idea at this time that Sturgis was working the Watergate Plumber thing. I did some checking with Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, and told them Sturgis wasn't working for us, and wasn't licensed to sell firearms or mention our particular brand name. Then I got the word that I'd spoiled something, stepped on somebody's toes. What I'd done got back to the Plumbers, apparently, and some people started using influence from Nixon's White House and the State Department to cancel our export licenses. They put us out of business.

ARGOSY: But what was Sturgis going to do with this scheme? Were there actually plans in the works to disrupt the Miami conventions in 1972?

HEMMING: It's hard to pinpoint Sturgis. Who knows whether *he* knew what was going on? But, yeah, there were plans for the convention. I talked to some of the people participating in it, who later participated in the Watergate thing.

ARGOSY: What were they planning?

HEMMING: Create a shoot-out, using the Yippies and Zippies and the other "hard-core Commies" they were so worried about. The people I spoke to were gonna put some of this equipment in *their* hands, and some in law-enforcement hands, and use some of the local vigilantes to start the shoot-out. This would finally straighten out Washington as to where the priorities were on overcoming the "domestic Communist menace."

ARGOSY: What stopped it from happening?

HEMMING: I think some other people created enough heat to prevent the equipment from falling into those hands. I think [James] McCord was one who did something about it. I've been told [J. Edgar] Hoover and certain Agency people were upset that certain other people were trying to create a private Gestapo in the U.S. So they penetrated it, and took measures to stop it. My blessings are with them.

ARGOSY: What seems so incredible is that so many groups with connections to the highest levels of government are able to go off on tangents and plan terrible deeds—right under the noses of the White House, the CIA, the FBI, and often seemingly with their blessing. Or at least with the blessing of a faction inside those government agencies. Can you cite any other examples of this kind of activity?

HEMMING: Well, you've got the real estate fraud involving Bell Mortgage. I've been working as an investigator for the attorney who filed Bell's suit against the CIA. It's a very complicated, very involved situation. It starts with Watergate, when you had a lot of CIA Cuban and American contract operatives coming under some pressure from [James] Schlesinger, who had taken over in the Agency. He'd started cleaning house, people were being fired left and right on short notice, and operations were being shut down. Then [William] Colby took over. He wanted summaries of everything that was happening.

Now a helluva lot of [CIA] contract employees working Latin America were *also* working for other Federal agencies, such as Internal Revenue and Drug Enforcement [DEA]. People like this start under CIA retainer, but the CIA budget can't afford them full-time, so they get traded around. Then, when Watergate started crumbling and everybody was pulling in their horns, these contract guys panicked and started setting up some new proprietary companies to fund Latin American operations. They might've looked for financial support through narcotics, too. But primarily, the proprietaries could supply enough funding to keep things going and buried from the scrutiny on Schlesinger and Colby until things quieted down. One of these was Bell Mortgage.

Andres Castro developed Bell Mortgage in 1969. He was very successful. Then he was asked if he'd be interested in talking to a couple of these local contract people because, they said, the CIA was looking for patriotic citizens to help as fronts for laundering money and financing operations. They told him a lot of banks were running scared because of Watergate, so [CIA] funds were frozen in certain banks in Florida and other places. See, at the same time here in Miami, there were other big businessmen who'd gotten

big through "dirty" money and who were under scrutiny by the IRS. They were being approached by these same Agency employees, who said they had friends in IRS and could get the heat off in exchange for a small donation to the Watergate Defense Fund. A lot of businessmen started playing ball.

Then, Andres Castro [of Bell Mortgage] meets with these CIA people. They explain how he can double up on mortgages and inflate the values on properties while at the same time passing some cash along to the CIA.

As time goes on, Andres is given some training in crypto-communications. They put a hot-line in his office, a phone in his car. They ask him to buy a more expensive, faster aircraft—to fly wounded personnel out of Central America to Bethesda Naval Hospital. Then they fly him down to Nicaragua, where he meets with President Somoza, the CIA chief of station, and Somoza's CIA-supplied bodyguard. Somoza confirms that the mortgage money is to be used to finance a "Company" [CIA] operation involving Chile, Panama and Costa Rica—specifically, it was for getting rid of [Salvador] Allende in Chile and Torrijos in Panama. [Allende was killed in the Chilean coup of September 1973.] Andres is told to start replacing his employees at Bell Mortgage, one by one, with CIA employees. He winds up having to deliver \$400,000 and then \$900,000 to two CIA contacts in Florida, through a guy named Guillermo Yglesias. Andres finally went to the CIA in Langley and told them what was going on. But the CIA had already been officially informed—and did absolutely nothing about it. Somebody with a law background would call that "misprision of a felony." But the CIA couldn't touch Guillermo Yglesias, because he had something on *them*. He had been in on an operation in 1964 when some Spanish seamen were murdered.

ARGOSY: What operation was that?

HEMMING: The CIA was using a group of Cuban exile naval commandos, affiliated with [Manuel] Artime and based primarily out of the Dominican Republic. Many of the participants were listed as Dominican Navy or Air Force officers, so if somebody ever nailed them in a big congressional investigation, they had their cover established. In 1964, one of the operations was to intercept and sink a Castro cargo vessel called the *Sierra Maestra*. They'd had surveillance on it when it left either a Finnish or Russian port, and they had an ambush set up to get it as it approached the Bahamas. But the boats that were set up for the intercept were being hampered by bad visibility. They saw this ship coming out of the fog, and the commander could make out the word *Sierra*, so they fired. They killed the captain and half the crew, and burned the hell out of the ship. And it was a *Spanish*

ship—the *Sierra Aranzazu*. All commando operations were cancelled the next day. It was all published in the press—except for who did the job. Our government denied knowing a goddamn thing about it. Well, there are murder warrants waiting in Spain for the CIA right now. Any of these people—Captain Mateo, Second Officer Remigio Arce, Engineering Officer Guillermo Yglesias—could all be hauled to Spain tomorrow and garroted for murder on the high seas. Some Americans would get hung, too.

ARGOSY: Were you ever personally involved in anything like this?

HEMMING: Oh, in 1961, some Mob people wanted my group to do a couple of jobs up in Canada. There was a ship that was supposed to go out through the St. Lawrence Seaway, carrying spare parts and aviation machinery to Cuba. They wanted us to hit it. Later, instead of doing that, they wanted us to beach it somewhere in South Carolina. We kind of frowned on that, because people call it piracy. It would not have been in our best interest to do some of the things they were promoting.

And I was aware of a couple of the attempts on Fidel. We [Interpen] felt Castro was so clumsy that leaving him in power suited our purpose more than allowing Raul [Castro] or Che [Guevara] or some of the more hard-core Communists to take control. Even the KGB [Russian intelligence] attempted a coup against Fidel in '63 because they wanted the Party and not some wild-eyed guerrilla operation in control.

ARGOSY: Who was paying your way back then?

HEMMING: There were dribs and drabs from people connected with organized crime, some from the right wing, and even some from quite liberal sources. An ex-dictator from Colombia sent us a monthly stipend because he envisioned someday using our [Interpen's] talents for his benefit. The same thing happened with an ex-dictator from Venezuela. Our job was mostly to introduce some Cuban exiles to people who had money, and also to show these exiles how to stay away from the suicide operations that other groups wanted 'em to do.

ARGOSY: You mentioned earlier that Howard Hughes' organization had its own operation in Florida that concentrated on Cuba. Can you go into more detail on that operation?

HEMMING: Getting research on the Hughes operation is well nigh impossible, but it was a sizeable organization. One Cuban exile organization was on a Hughes retainer handled by C. Osmant Moody, who's now, I think, southeastern director for one of Hughes' larger insurance outfits located in Miami. The guy's a millionaire himself.

ARGOSY: Do you know of any attempts to assassinate Castro that emanated from

this Hughes network?

HEMMING: More than one. The group Moody had on retainer inserted numerous teams into Cuba, trying to do hits, and a helluva lot of people got killed. In 1961, eighty-eight of their people were executed by Fidel. Then I know of a job they were gonna do on Fidel in Miramar, Cuba, in 1964. There was a bad scene in Key West when one of the boats blew up and a guy got killed.

For another hit, Sturgis' buddy Diaz Lanz was brought in to do the job, and he left for Cuba from Cay Sal. Cay Sal is technically part of the Bahamas, but the Hughes Tool Company has a ninety-nine-year lease on it. From Key West, Osmant Moody oversees it and a Bahamian named Robinson is stationed there. If strangers came on, he'd radio to Moody. You didn't go near Cay Sal unless it was cleared, either through Moody or the Agency. It was really a launching area place to run to when people have a rough time getting out. Of course, others who wanted to get out just went to an intelligence ship—a *Pueblo*-type vessel called U.S.S. *Oxford*—that moved up and down the coast.

ARGOSY: Did you know Robert Maheu, the Hughes man who served as the liaison between the CIA and the Mob on some of the other attempts on Castro? Or John Roselli, the Mob guy who was one of Maheu's contacts?

HEMMING: Names like Maheu didn't come up. John Roselli I knew—but I didn't know who he was. He was using the name Phil. These are guys who don't use their last names.

ARGOSY: Was the Hughes-CIA-Mob link around Cuba a wedding or a rivalry?

HEMMING: Convenience. You're not talking about Hughes himself on a lot of these things. But the interest of some lower- or middle-echelon Hughes people was to provoke situations and lobby where they could. There were things they could all make a buck on. It's hard to say what kind of operations, though.

ARGOSY: Anything else you can tell us about anti-Castro operations back then?

HEMMING: Well, if you want to get into the Senate's foreign assassinations report, the "B-1" that they mention as a CIA contact to assassinate Fidel is Manuel Artime. [Artime, a close friend of Howard Hunt, was among the exile leaders in the planning of the Bay of Pigs invasion]. And "AM/LASH," the guy the CIA gave the poisons to for administering to Fidel, is Rolando Cubela. He's under house arrest in Cuba now. Hunt was in on that, too. Desmond Fitzgerald [CIA Western Hemisphere chief] and some of his boys were running the "Z-R Rifle" Castro assassination operation the Senate talks about in its report.

ARGOSY: What about the tracking down of Che Guevara in Bolivia in 1967? Was that a CIA operation?

HEMMING: The team was under Major

Shelton, a Special Forces commander in Panama. They got the okay from the Joint Chiefs to do the operation on Che. Once they'd determined that Che was giving Cuban-type guerrilla training in Bolivia, they took two teams down to Santa Cruz del Sur to train anti-Che Bolivian rangers. This took about four months. Then they went on the hunt, using special C-130 aircraft—including U-2 overflights and infrared photography—to locate Che people. They finally nailed him. [Alonzo] Gonzalez and a guy called Ramirez did the job on Che. [Gonzalez, a Cuban, was educated in the U.S., and worked for the Office of Naval Intelligence in Guantanamo.]

All this was a kind of Operation Phoenix [the CIA's Vietnam terror and assassination campaign] for Latin America. There's a guy in Miami who worked on this more than once. Evidently he's now had a falling out with some Cubans involved in narcotics. He's a close friend of Bebe Rebozo, and Rebozo's interested in protecting him.

ARGOSY: What kind of role does Nixon's friend Rebozo play in all this?

HEMMING: He's no more than a bagman. He was the guy who had prime responsibility for sifting through all the plots, schemes and connections—to find the ones that would best benefit "tricky Dick." Some of the local Cuban exiles penetrated the Nixon circle and were guests at the presidential compound. The Secret Service logs would show that—if you could find them.

ARGOSY: This connection between people in government and Cuban exiles or other Latin American operatives is amazing. Can you think of anything else along those lines?

HEMMING: The Trujillo thing in the Dominican Republic, back in '61 and before that. There was an American, an ex-Marine, who worked for Arturo Espallat, Trujillo's chief of intelligence. He got involved in some of the Trujillo operations—the Galindez kidnapping, an attempted assassination of [Romulo] Betancourt of Venezuela, and some anti-Castro and anti-Haiti things. All through this, Trujillo was kicking some money in the right direction—to Congressman Cooley, Senator [George] Smathers, and some others. A whole gang of congressmen got real friendly with those people. And this American ex-Marine was the bagman; he could get entree to those people. He did all the English publications that Trujillo sent up to congressmen and wrote pro-Trujillo articles for the *Indianapolis Star*, which Trujillo also kicked money into. But he knew it was only a matter of time before Trujillo's end. [The CIA helped ensure Trujillo's assassination in 1961.] Espallat knew the whole scheme, and suggested to his American aide that it looked like Washington was gonna "go all the way,"

so why not just watch what happened? Espallat tried to take over after the hit went down. He died in an accident in Lisbon a few years ago. His American friend went to work for a private CIA operation in Baltimore called International Services of Information.

ARGOSY: When you talked to the Senate, you also mentioned a remarkable situation around a former Florida governor named Ferris Bryant.

HEMMING: Yes, he was governor before Claude Kirk. Well, by early 1962 we'd [Interpen] established a very good relationship with some very influential people in the United States. It had taken a lot of hard work, a helluva lot of talking and convincing. And some of this led us to Governor Bryant's staff. He, along with Senator [Kenneth] Keating and some others, were recipients of raw intelligence about Cuba, prior to the missile crisis. And he was concerned about the possibility of Florida suffering the first damage in any encounter. During the Southeastern Governor's Conference in September 1962, he'd planned to bring some of the governors into our exile training camps, go public and say he was organizing a state militia to train American and Cuban exile volunteers, in case of any threat from Cuba. This was based on an old law instituted when Florida came into the union, which said that the state could have foreign dealings and its own small state department to conduct preventive warfare against the Indians. About this time, James Meredith unexpectedly walked into the University of Mississippi [creating a civil rights crisis] and this broke up the governor's conference. The Kennedy people moved in fast to get a hold of Bryant and brief him [tell him to keep quiet] about the imminent missile crisis. Afterwards, the Kennedy people got him to Washington, D.C. as Director of the Office of Emergency Planning. This gave him a seat on the National Security Council, a place where you can brief somebody to death. They put him "on the team."

ARGOSY: Then there was considerable advance warning on the missile crisis?

HEMMING: My group had started getting information from Cuba indicating tighter security activity, more than just anti-aircraft missile defense operations, and enlargement of Russian facilities. These later were identified to be the SAM sites and mobile medium-range ballistic missiles. But as far as we were concerned, the missiles were never delivered to the island. Preparations were made, but our information indicated there never was a missile in Cuba. Kennedy was scammed. He was so suspicious of the CIA's photo-interpreters that he insisted that the Defense people take over. [CIA Director John] McCone was away on his honeymoon, and then his son-in-law got into a strange accident [keeping him away longer]. All kinds of things were going on

while *somebody* was trying to provoke a confrontation between Cuba and the U.S. We were more than willing to go along with that—the night Kennedy went on TV, we'd launched a boat on an operation from Marathon Key to Havana province—but the crisis wasn't real. You look at who benefited from such things and you could see how they'd be engineered. I think Kennedy found out towards the end, and that's why things developed as they did.

ARGOSY: It seems we're getting back to the Kennedy assassination. One final thing that's surfaced in recent weeks—the Exner woman who had relationships with both Kennedy and Mobsters Sam Giancana and John Roselli.

HEMMING: Yes, this was the Mob penetrating the White House. When you talk about the Mob, you're not talking about a homogeneous unit. The only homogeneous part is Lansky's, but the Mob is mostly feudal warlords in major cities. Quite a few have developed their own CIAs. This is right in line with their penetration of law-enforcement agencies, which gives them access to things like judges and FBI documents. They've learned how to wire tap the FBI just like the FBI wire taps them. Their program has always been, naturally, to penetrate at the highest level. And they did. They did it very well. There were Cubans up in the White House, too—select Cubans kept on government retainers, who knew everything going on and at some point made Mob connections. Some stayed at Bobby Kennedy's house, and one dated Jackie's social secretary. They have since gravitated to good political positions in the U.S. and elsewhere. They became part of the political family up there. We [Interpen] monitored them, and used them like the Mob used them.

ARGOSY: Do you mind our asking how you came to possess all this information?

HEMMING: It's a very small world in this business. We're all the same people. You don't go outside a circle, you know? If you're involved in arms supply or whatever, it's always the same contacts. We had guys constantly working with us until they were picked up by the CIA. Then when the CIA dropped them, they'd come back to us. These Cubans' prime belief was that we were the *good* CIA guys. To stay in good with us, they'd even check with us *prior* to operations. So here I was, sitting in the street with people pouring in and out with all kinds of confidential information.

ARGOSY: Why have you decided to talk about it now?

HEMMING: These last ten years have been a tremendous education. South of the border you learn a lot of things you're not taught in school, and you can get past the propaganda if you know how to read it. I learned from one of my early contacts in intelligence—a gentleman who later killed

himself—that if I wanted to stay alive, I had better never pass on anything that could be attributed to me. I should be an anonymous phone caller. If I didn't cover my tracks, he told me, I would soak up some lead. Since that time, I have basically just stuck my nose into things to find out if other people knew about them. I'd later find [using this method] that some who were supposed to know *didn't*, and others did, but did nothing about it. In my younger years, I felt they knew better than me, so I'd just keep my mouth shut. Now that the years have gone by, I find out *why* things happened in a certain way.

ARGOSY: Are there others like yourself who'd now be willing to go public?

HEMMING: There are some people who are a little perturbed. They saw how the Cuban situation was used for personal gain by Nixon people, CIA people and everybody else. For a long time, they believed this was one country that wasn't like Latin America, where everybody's on the take. The Watergate thing really burned 'em. They're feeling low about it. And they've got a pretty clear picture of things. They know they were used.

ARGOSY: Any final thoughts on the state of the union?

HEMMING: I can still see the need for covert operations. But I can't see FBI, CIA or other government employees breaking the law. That's right around the corner from Gestapo. If guys can go out and murder while they're carrying government IDs, what are they gonna do next week? You always need that "snoopin' and poopin'," that's what the Agency was designed for. But keep covert operations separate. Go hire the goddamn mercenaries and let *them* do the dirty work. Then you're not involving the flag, and you don't have government men running dope and doing hits on the side for money.

Look, every time you turn around, the CIA is supporting one side or the other, or mucking around diplomatically, trying to screw things up. And all the foul-ups they had would never have occurred if they'd kept their fingers out. Allende didn't have a chance in Chile until they started fighting him. Just supporting the right-wing and giving them more than they had coming, gave *more* support to Allende. If they'd stayed out, nature would have taken its course. Some disgruntled Chilean would've blown his head off. Or he would have turned into a Tito or something. Now it comes back on us.

They're always so worried about some guy going Commie. To this day, Castro is not a Communist. He isn't about to take orders from somebody. He isn't *stupid* enough to follow anybody else's doctrine. He's gonna listen to some Muscovite jerk that's never been out in the [Cuban] bush? Bullshit!

Yeah, all these people that are so worried about conspiracies. . . . They're *creating* the conspiracies. ■