

Page over

'Brothers' Pilot Disappears

Cuban Defector Suspected of Being Agent for Castro

By William Branigin
Washington Post Staff Writer

MIAMI, Feb. 26—The mysterious disappearance of a Cuban defector who joined Brothers to the Rescue, a group of volunteer pilots opposed to Cuba's communist government, has baffled Miami's Cuban exile community and raised suspicion that he may have been an infiltrator loyal to Cuban leader Fidel Castro.

That suspicion appeared to be confirmed this evening when Juan Pablo Roque appeared on Cuban television and denounced Brothers to the Rescue as a "counterrevolutionary group" and said it had planned attacks in Cuba, according to a Reuter report.

The timing of Roque's disappearance, around midday Friday, had fueled speculation that he had something to do with Saturday's downing of two of the organization's planes by Cuban fighter jets.

The Havana government said earlier today it had "with us" in Cuba an exile pilot from Brothers to the Rescue, but it did not identify the man. "This pilot knows a lot," an official statement said.

In Washington, an administration official said speculation that Roque was a Cuban agent planted in the exile organization was "consistent with our information."

Roque is a former Cuban air force MIG fighter pilot who defected four years ago by

swimming across part of Guantanamo Bay. He vanished from Miami a day before three Brothers to the Rescue planes set out on what organizers said was a mission to search the Florida Strait for Cubans fleeing their homeland on rafts.

FBI agents went to Roque's suburban Miami home today to investigate reports that he may have returned to Cuba. Roque's wife told the agents that her husband had not been home for several days, a Miami television station reported. He told a friend he was going on a weekend fishing trip.

Roque joined Brothers to the Rescue immediately after reaching Miami and as warmly welcomed, said Steve Walton, an American Airlines pilot who has flown 100 missions with the group.

"It appears that it was a penetration of the group," Walton said. "I used to laugh at these guys for being paranoid. I guess they weren't paranoid enough."

Walton said Roque ranked high enough in Brothers to the Rescue that he would have known about plans to mount an operation on Saturday and may have known who would be aboard the airplanes.

Billy Schuss, a co-founder of Brothers to the Rescue, said he did not know Roque's whereabouts or whether he had returned to Cuba. He acknowledged that if Roque was an infiltrator, he would have been able to tell Car-



ASSOCIATED PRESS
Ana Roque cries while hugging a neighbor in Miami. Her husband, a volunteer pilot with Brothers to the Rescue, has disappeared and is suspected of working for Fidel Castro.

ban authorities much about the group's activities.

"He was one of our regulars," Schuss said. "He was very close to us."

Last July, Roque was one of six Brothers to the Rescue pilots who flew over an exile flotilla of a dozen boats that tried to enter Cuban

waters to mark the first anniversary of the sinking of a tugboat crammed with refugees.

The group wanted to drop 40 white roses in the water where the boat had gone down, to commemorate the 40 refugees.

Staff writer Ann Devroy in Washington contributed to this report.