

Defector's Return Baffles Exile

Many Suspect Pilot Was Agent of Castro Who Fooled Loved

By William Booth
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MIAMI, Feb. 27—If Juan Pablo Roque was a spy, as his friends and family now suspect, he was a very, very good one. He not only fooled his wife, his two brothers and his comrades in Miami's exile community, but apparently the FBI and perhaps the CIA as well.

And now Roque is the man at the middle of an unfolding, high-stakes drama, with charges and countercharges flying between Cuba and the United States in the aftermath of Saturday's downing by a Cuban MiG of two U.S. civilian airplanes flown by the anti-Castro group here called Brothers to the Rescue.

Roque, a former Cuban MiG pilot and fitness buff who defected in 1992, disappeared mysteriously here Friday but turned up in Havana over the weekend to denounce Brothers to the Rescue and its leaders, accusing them of being CIA dupes and terrorist provocateurs bent on fomenting confrontation between the United States and Cuba and of plotting to assassinate President Fidel Castro.

Yet here in Miami, many believe Roque was a skilled agent, a Trojan horse, in a calculated plot by Castro not only to shoot down a pair of Cessnas but also to discredit Miami's Cuban exiles and, in the process, warn off dissidents at home.

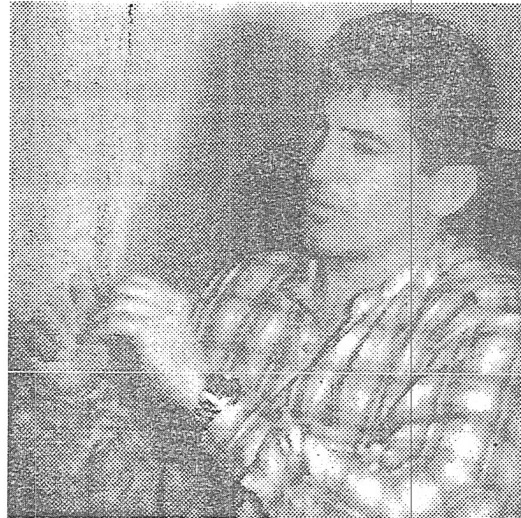
Exactly who is Roque? Right now, he is the mysterious man who is Miami's obsession.

The dashing Cuban pilot was celebrated as a hero by Miami's exile community when he fled the communist island four years ago. For if a man like Roque, a privileged son of Castro's revolution, would defect and denounce the regime, then surely the communist government would soon fall, perhaps even with the help of disgruntled Cuban soldiers such as Roque, who served the Cuban Air Force for 18 years, learning fighter tactics in the former Soviet Union and retiring as a major.

So popular was Roque and his tale of defection by swimming across Guantanamo Bay to the U.S. naval base there that the conservative Cuban American National Foundation last year published his book, "Defector." Yet when Roque disappeared here Friday, abandoning his car, his wallet and his wife, his elaborately constructed story began to crack. He said he was leaving for the weekend to deliver a boat, but he took with him his best suits and shoes. His wife of one year overheard him tell a son still living in Cuba that he would "surprise" him on his birthday.

And when he appeared on Cuban television Monday night to denounce Brothers to the Rescue as terrorists and CIA dupes, the shock was almost palpable.

Ana, his wife, stood outside the couple's suburban Miami home, trembling and in tears, disbelieving that she literally had been sleeping with the enemy.



CUBAN TV VIA AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Juan Pablo Roque denounces the activities of Cuban exile group Brothers to the Rescue.

The couple met in church, and Ana said he was a good man, a family man.

But, in hindsight, there were definite signs that something was amiss with Roque's story. Roque seemed to have too much money for someone so recently arrived, his former comrades say. He seemed, also, maybe too eager. But so many defectors are.

Roque's brother, Alejandro, who also escaped from Cuba and now lives in Miami, said, "If our brother betrayed us, his conscience will not leave him alone, and in due time he will render accounts. . . . Anyone who supports or plays the game of Fidel Castro is our enemy."

After arriving in Miami, Roque quickly began a fixture in the swirling, impassioned world of Cuban exile politics. He formed a group of former Cuban military men and began making radio broadcasts back to Cuba. Guillermo Lares, a Brothers pilot and general manager of Husta International, an aviation company, gave Roque a job as an assistant in the parts department. He was paid \$10 an hour.

Roque also joined Brothers to the Rescue and flew at least 11 missions as a co-pilot, searching for rafters floundering in the Florida Strait. He also participated in a controversial "Freedom Flotilla," in which a dozen boats chartered by Cuban exiles sailed toward Cuba to denounce Castro and encourage citizens on the island to stage mass acts of civil disobedience.

And, it turns out, he also was helping the the FBI.

At the time of his defection, Roque was debriefed by the CIA, FBI and military intelligence officials, federal law enforcement sources said. He was questioned about Cuban military installations and activities as well their intelligence operations within the United States. The bureau developed a file on him and likely tracked him a short period but devoted

Community

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fairly limited resources, if any, to his surveillance. They did, however, listen to information he occasionally volunteered about plans by Brothers to the Rescue and other exile groups against the Castro regime.

The FBI is now in a cover mode, rechecking Roque's movements and Miami contacts to make certain he did not get access to any U.S. government intelligence, counterintelligence sources said today.

Roque's rapid involvement with Brothers to the Rescue and his formation of the military defectors group strongly suggested his role was to come here and funnel information back to Cuba, these sources said.

"They are trying to see what he was doing here, to see if there is any evidence he was doing anything more than looking into exile groups," one source said. "I think he came to infiltrate the Brothers to the Rescue. Castro has been pretty good at that sort of thing, agents, double agents."

The Cuban government and Miami exile are engaged in an ongoing large-scale counterintelligence war, with each side slipping agents into the other's operations, sources said. FBI officials have long maintained that the Cuban government has largely infiltrated every anti-Castro group in Miami.

Jose Basulto, the founder of Brothers, who also wrote a glowing blurb for Roque's book, said he was not so much angered as saddened by his former friend's apparent double life.

Basulto said today perhaps Roque was disillusioned, and that he did not come here with the intention of being a spy. The dashing young pilot was reduced to "pumping gas at Opa Locka Airport," Basulto said. Maybe he did not fit in, he said.

He hopes somehow that Roque was forced to return to Cuba in order to protect his two children still living on the island, Basulto said, but few of Roque's former comrades buy that idea.

"He is an impostor and a double agent," said Lar-es. "And he broke a family's heart. He betrayed his nation; he betrayed his family; he betrayed his brothers; he betrayed his colleagues in flying; and someday he is going to pay for that—everybody pays for what they do in this world. Everything he said is a lie."

"He seemed so honest and sincere. His feeling toward the Cuban cause and the plight of rafter, the plight of Cuban people on the island seemed so sincere. I can't get over the shock, it almost seems impossible," said Leona Adolfo, director of the Endowment for Cuban American Studies at the Cuban American National Foundation, which published Roque's book.

Staff writer Pierre Thomas and special correspondent Catharine Skipp contributed to this report.