

# Memorandum



Subject	Debriefing and statement of Herbert John. Trip to Montevideo Apr. 9 thru Apr. 30, 1985	Date	May 6, 1985
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To

From Arnold H. Stolz  
Mengele Team

The debriefing of Mr. Herbert John was conducted on May 6, 1985. A statement was obtained from Mr. John and is attached hereto.

Mr. John submitted the following names and or addresses of persons he was in contact with while in Uruguay. These persons can be interviewed at a later date if necessary;

1. Milton Garravantes  
Secretary to the Chief of Police for Uruguay in Montevideo.
2. Juan Andrade  
Retired Police Official  
Presently owns a detective agency in Montevideo  
Telephone- 43438
3. Christian Reckman  
Banker for Branaa  
Banco de Montevideo  
Casilla de Correo 612  
Montevideo, Uruguay
4. Dr. Klaus Roessler  
German/Uruguay Chamber of Commerce  
Montevideo, Uruguay
5. Garcia  
Director of the ID Bureau of Montevideo
6. Sztemberg, Israel (Personal friend of Mr. John)  
Ernesto Bavio 3051  
Buenos Aires, Argentina  
Telephone- 782-5502
7. Boris (DEA Informant)  
Owner of Nightclub Baires  
Montevideo, Uruguay

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DATE 2000 2006

Any contact made with the above persons, with the exception of Sztemberg, should be made through Mr. Andrade.

8. Thomas Romang  
Bolonia 1947  
Montevideo

(Former neighbor of Branaa who claims that when he knew Branaa he had a space between his upper front teeth. This gap has since been covered with denture caps.)

9. Walter Hourdebaigt  
General Secretary of the Leather Workers Union  
in Montevideo.

Beginning of tape.

JOHN: I spotted Branaa and his wife on Saturday. I spotted them on Saturday April 13th in their beach house in Punta Bayana. Punta Bayana is completely abundant during off season. All the houses are closed. All the restaurants are closed. There is not one human being at the beach. It was therefore very difficult for me to observe the house. I noticed though that Branaa was the only one in the area to spend all his weekends all year round at the beach resort. I noticed that house a little bit on top of the Branaa chalet that two men were sitting on a balcony watching the Branaa house all day long. During the season when the place is crowded and thousands of people are there, I had not noticed it. It took me another two or three days to discover what had happened with Branaa. A man named Pedro who owner of a limousine service told me that ABC news had arrived from Miami with three (3) men, twenty-nine (29) bags at the Hotel Victoria Plaza. They had hired three (3) limousines and had driven with all of their equipment to the Foreign Ministry where they had asked for an interview

with the Foreign Minister. Fortunately they took Pedro, the owner of the limousine service, with them all the time because he had to help them carry the stuff and he also served kind of as an interpreter. They had told the Minister of Foreign Affairs that they suspected Walter Branaa to be Josef Mengele and that they wanted to interview Mr. Walter Branaa. The Minister then phoned Branaa who appeared at the Ministry and when confronted with the circumstantial evidence that ABC possessed became very indignant and told them in no uncertain terms that he was really Walter Branaa, and he was an Uruguayan. He then called his son who was working at the factory who also appeared as a witness, the son Marselle who told the ABC people this is my father, he has always been my father. Branaa, Walter Branaa and young Branaa then took the ABC people to a school where little Walter had graduated from some fifty odd years ago. And they found in the records that really Walter Branaa had been a pupil many years ago. And they even saw an old class photo and Branaa pointed out at one little head and said that was me. The ABC people were then also taken to the Branaa factory and Branaa told them this is my life's work. At that point the ABC crew became convinced that it was all a mistake. They apologized, drove out to the airport and left. Then I knew what had happened. After that Branaa did not return to his factory. He stayed a few more days in Montevideo and then disappeared. According to a rumor in the factory among his workers he was planning to retire soon and leave the factory to his son. The police in Montevideo received a message from him that he was going to stay away from Montevideo for awhile and that he might

leave the country. My friend Sztemberg has found out meanwhile that he is staying in a house he owns in the province, (name), at the northern most tip of Uruguay. He has a telephone there and his wife is calling him everyday from the beach house. The wife has not returned to Montevideo. She has stayed all week at the beach house and has never left the house. The son, Marselle is the only one who goes to and fro. Since it had become very difficult and very dangerous to observe the scenery without being detected I approached a young man whom I knew already. His name is Milton Garravantes. He is the Secretary of the Police Chief of Uruguay. At night he also works as a security man at the only elegant hotel of Montevideo, the Victoria Plaza Hotel. Milton Garravantes presented me to a friend of his, Juan Andrade, retired police officer who is today the owner of a detective agency. From then on I worked with these two gentlemen. According to Garravantes the intelligence service of the Uruguayan police has the following version of the Branaa story. Walter Branaa who is married to a lady named Ester Formento(sp?) an Italian lady from Northern Italy, died in a traffic accident in 1959. Mrs. Branaa was at that time a friend of Martha Mengele who had married Josef Mengele in 1958 in Uruguay and who was living under her real name in Montevideo. After Branaa's death Mengele decided to buy Branaa's identity. According to the intelligence service the whole story is nearly perfect. He only made one mistake. At the Municipal Court where they have the register of all deaths, they forgot to erase the death of Walter Branaa. But I could not get into the records because the judicial system in Uruguay is on strike. The courts were closed. According

to Garravantes at first Mengele used the new identity only occasionally when he wanted to have a rest or a vacation in Montevideo. He then showed up more and more frequently and he stayed at the house of the Widow Branaa. The two sons of Branaa, Marselle and Daniel. Marselle knew from the beginning that his father had died and that the new Walter Branaa was not his real father. Daniel the younger one was only told when he became a grownup what the real story was. He then broke with his parents and has never talked to them again. In 1972 when the Military grabbed power in Uruguay, Mengele decided to use the Branaa identity from then on, on a permanent basis. He has been living with the Branaa Widow ever since. And he bought, the Branaa family owned a very small canning factory, he bought out all the Branaas, their houses, their shares in the factory, and so on. And Eba, the younger brother of the real Walter Branaa retired then to Switzerland. Nancy, the sister also went to live in Europe. Daniel the young son was also sent to Spain and has been living in Spain ever since. The Branaa Tanning factory then grew spectacularly. It is estimated that about ten (10) million dollars was invested to modernize the factory and to expand the capacity. According to the banker of the Branaa factory, a German banker named Christian Reckman, Branaa is the only industrialist in Uruguay who does not have any debts. Every Uruguayan citizen has to have a ID card. He is registered at the National Office of Civil Identification. Juan Andrade, the owner of the detective agency contacted the director of that office. The director, a

man named Mr. Garcia, told the following story. At the end of 1972 when the Military came to power he was given a list of persons whose records he had to take out of the general file and put under key in his office. Nearly all the names on that list were generals or their wives or their girlfriends. About the only civilian was Walter Branaa. When he asked General Alvarez(sp?) who later became the president of the Junta why Branaa, he was told that is Mengele. Early in '83 Branaa presented himself at National Identification Office to have his ID card renewed. He was taken to the Office of the Director where he was given the new ID card. The card had the signature, the photo, and on the back the fingerprints of the two thumbs. The Director, Mr. Garcia says that nobody ever inquired of Branaa's file until early January '85, a foreigner, a member of, a functionary of a foreign embassy appeared at the National Identification Office offered one of the employee's a hundred (\$100.00) dollars and asked for the Branaa file. The employee went, tried to get it out and didn't find any file on that name. Then the foreigner went up to the Director's office and inquired what had happened. He was willing to pay money he said but the Director was afraid to get involved with a foreign embassy and didn't attend him. Only a few weeks later a two Israelis appeared at the Office of the Director and said they were willing to pay fifty thousand dollars (\$50,000.00) if Garcia would help them identify Branaa. But the director was afraid the Israelis were planning to kill Branaa and he didn't want to get involved in a murder case. So he refused to deal with them. And then a French man appeared at the National Identification Office and tried to

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get a hold of the Branaa file. He offered very little money and didn't get anywhere. I had to negotiate with a man for about a week. He knew the file could be worth alot of money. He was very much afraid and very greedy. I finally offered to give him a check for fifty thousand dollars. I told him the check has no funds, it is not worth anything unless we discover that Branaa is really Mengele. Then I will return to Uruguay and you will get paid. If not I will call you and will tell you to rip up the check. The man agreed to that and handed over a copy of everything in his office.

Break in the tape, an added statement.

JOHN: With reverence to the beach house of Mr. Branaa. I observed that (STOP IN TAPE) thirty to forty to feet higher than the Branaa house is always occupied by several men. I saw two men constantly sitting on the balcony and observing the Branaa house. Garravantes, the police officer I mentioned earlier told me that these are Rangers of the Uruguayan Army. They have leave of absence, are paid by Mr. Branaa to protect the beach house and are relieved every Sunday night at midnight. (STOP IN TAPE) He had not appeared at his office at the Tanning factory. When I phoned I was told by the secretary that he was out and she didn't know when or whether he'd be back.