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Plucked From Prisons

# Castro Gets 'The Hook' in Swap for CIA Agents

It was the strangest lot of prisoners yet that New York lawyer James B. Donovan had plucked from Fidel Castro's political prisons in Havana. Of the 27, three were agents of the Central Intelligence Agency. Another was a former Air Force colonel who had once carried a rifle with Castro's ragtag guerrillas in the mountains. One was the brother of a cartoonist who had angered Castro.

And then there was John Robert Gentile of Cleveland, a soldier of fortune who returned last week with a wildly improbable story about how he almost killed Castro. But Mr. Gentile had to tell his story from a jail in Cleveland, where he was taken to answer questions about several bad checks.

Mr. Gentile was 27 when he sold his gun shop in Cleveland four years ago and drove off to Miami with \$2,500 in his pocket and several dozen old pistols stuffed in a scuffed cardboard suitcase. Someone in Miami introduced him to Dr. Jose Prendes Herra, a Cuban lawyer who was promoting trouble for Castro. The doctor bought Mr. Gentile's one-way ticket to Havana.

### Bearded Man Grabs Him

"When I got off the plane I was grabbed by a bearded man in uniform who told me, 'You coming with me,'" Mr. Gentile said.

"I found out he was Bill Morgan, a full colonel in Castro's army but actually fed up with Castro and stealing Castro's guns and money for the counterrevolutionaries. That way I didn't have to pass through customs. They put me up in the Ocean-side Hotel. Morgan's been executed since. He asked me all kind of questions. I had

to show him I knew guns and that I knew how to wire dynamite sticks in parallel.

"I let my beard grow. They brought me a uniform and I walked the streets with a gun in my belt. I was no longer a tourist but a Cuban soldier. They called me Caballo Loco, or Crazy Horse. The reason was, I guess, that I enjoyed guns and bombs the way kids enjoy firecrackers."

Mr. Gentile's assignment was simple: Sabotage, assassination, arms running, stealing, and making bombs. Finally, Dr. Herra looked him up again in Havana with the hardest job of all: Find and kill Castro. If he made it and lived to collect it, Mr. Gentile would be paid \$25,000.

### Rendezvous in Havana

"About a dozen of us met in a house in Havana to plan Castro's death," he said. Two informants from the Palace of Justice had tipped us off that Castro would attend a wedding in Vedado. We had cased the place and planned to attack through every window, lobbing bombs and killing everything that moved with machine guns. It didn't matter because they all were Communists, anyhow.

"Dr. Herra was instructing us. I had just started to hand out the guns and bombs when suddenly G-2s (Cuban intelligence police) poured in on us from every direction, through doors and windows. Somebody gave us away. I'd taken only two steps into another room when I found a gun pointed right between my eyes and a voice said, 'One move and you're dead.' That was it."

Last week's swap was "it" for Mr. Donovan too. He said he had cleaned out Castro's prisons of Americans and wouldn't be going back. To demonstrate his "good faith," he took along his 20-

year-old son, John, and the boy and the bearded prime minister went skin diving and spearfishing together.

But Mr. Donovan obviously had other backing. With the release of the 27 Americans, authorities in the United States released four Cubans, including Francisco "The Hook" Molina, who was convicted of killing a 9-year-old girl in a brawl in a New York City cafe three years ago.

Castro obviously wanted Molina, a trusted aide, and the United States obviously wanted its three CIA agents. Since Castro apparently didn't know who they were he had to agree to release all 27 Americans. As usual, the CIA admitted nothing, but congressional sources in Washington identified the CIA men as Daniel L. Carswell of Eastchester, N.Y., Eustice H. Vanbrunt of Baltimore, and Edmund K. Taransky of New York City.