

PROVO HERALD (UT)
22 April 1981

Herald in Washington

We Have Time Left to Right Our Wrong to Patriot

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WASHINGTON — Frank G. Emmick, the American businessman - turned- CIA spy who for 14 years was held as a political prisoner in Cuba until 1978 and whose story appeared recently in this column is dead.

Emmick, 66, had survived being beaten unconscious and thrown into the sea for dead by Fidel Castro's goons. He had survived a bayoneting by prison guards, who regularly threatened him with death before a firing squad. And he had survived a severe heart condition in prison that saw him taking up to 20 nitroglycerin tablets a day.

Frank Emmick survived, Cuba. But he couldn't survive his own government.

While a prisoner in Cuba, he had sailed against the wind blowing out of the Carter administration in favor of warmer relations with Castro. His return home in January 1978,

widely healded elsewhere, was met with icy silence by the administration, which had disowned him.

For the next three years, Emmick petitioned his government in vain for redress of several legitimate grievances.

Living near the poverty line in Toledo, Ohio with his wife Raphael, he sought special compensation for a service-connected disability, first applied for 37 years ago from the Veterans Administration. The VA finally agreed to his claim last October and promised compensation. But six months later, not a dime had been sent.

Emmick, virtually penniless and weighted down by stress, told me in March that, "I'm broken hearted but I'm not broken...but I don't know how much longer I can go on this way."

On April 4, Emmick and his wife went dancing. Shortly after midnight, as they were walking off the floor hand-in-hand, he clutched at his chest and fell to the floor. He

was dead.

It is too late for the Reagan administration to help Frank Emmick. But it is not too late for this administration to redress past wrongs and honor his heroic service to America by granting to Emmick's widow what it legitimately owes him.

In doing so, President Reagan would be making a powerful statement to friends of freedom everywhere, that, from now on, patriotism transcends politics in the United States.

In a ceremony recently at the State Department, awards for valor were presented to foreign service employees among the Americans who had been held hostage in Iran. Without denigrating their service, it can be noted that their major achievement was simply surviving the 14-month ordeal.

Emmick on the other hand, truly was the stuff of which heroes are made. Late in 1960, on the eve of the

rupture in U.S.-Cuba relations, the CIA station chief in Cuba, a man named Carlos Casaus, fled the country.

Shortly thereafter, Casaus contacted Emmick through an intermediary and asked him to take up the CIA's work. Emmick, motivated by patriotism — he never was paid for his clandestine activities — agreed.

During the next three years, until his imprisonment in September of 1963, Emmick was of enormous help to the West.

He secreted out hundreds of documents to the CIA detailing sensitive activities in Cuba, especially those involving the Soviet Union: assisted intelligence agents visiting Cuba in locating Cuban defense installations; and, in April 1962, provided Washington an early warning of the Soviet buildup that culminated that fall in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Thrown into prison in September 1963 — his seafood business had been confiscated two years earlier

— Emmick refused to divulge CIA secrets or give any credence to the charge that he was head of the agency in Cuba. His stubborn resistance continued for 14 years, during which time he smuggled numerous notes out of prison, giving Washington valuable inside information on Cuba.

In 1977, Emmick also sent two letters to President Carter via western diplomats, warning that he wouldn't allow Carter to use him as a pawn in the administration's attempts to normalize relations with Cuba. If the United States recognized Castro, Emmick wrote, he would consider himself an American "dissident" and refuse repatriation.

Since Emmick's return in January, 1978, every petition to Washington has met a brick wall. The CIA disavows any connection with him — despite strong evidence to the contrary.

A cable from Pope Paul VI welcoming him home to freedom —

Emmick was a devout Catholic — was sent via the State Department, which has refused to furnish the written text to Emmick despite repeated requests. A valuable heirloom ring which Emmick smuggled out of prison, destined for his son in Ohio, was lost in the mail through the State Department's carelessness.

The VA refused to pay for his triple-bypass open-heart surgery in 1978 which left him with \$20,000 in bills, and has failed to this time to pay the special compensation it agreed to in October.

Emmick's widow, Raphael who turns 63 in June, has been working two jobs to make ends meet and pay the rent on their modest Toledo home.

Like her husband, Raphael Emmick is an optimist. She still believes there is justice in Washington. President Reagan now has an opportunity however belated, to prove she's right.