

WASHINGTON POST
16 October 1986

Managua Links Plane Figure to '76 Bombing

By Julia Preston

Washington Post Foreign Service

MANAGUA, Nicaragua, Oct. 15—Top Sandinista officials claimed today that one of two alleged CIA employes of Cuban origin said to have supervised a secret air resupply operation in El Salvador is a fugitive Cuban terrorist.

The officials quoted American prisoner Eugene Hasenfus, 45, as saying the Cuban, reportedly known in El Salvador as "Ramon Medina," told associates there that he was a "friend" of Vice President Bush.

Deputy Interior Minister Luis Carrion and Commander Lenin Cerna, head of the state security police, reported at a midday press conference that they had concluded "Medina" actually is Luis Posada Carriles, who is wanted in Venezuela, they said, for the 1976 bombing of a Cubana Airlines plane in which 73 persons were killed.

Reporters have not been able to question Hasenfus, captured Oct. 6 in southern Nicaragua the day after his C123K cargo plane was downed. The press has no direct knowledge of the conditions under which he is being held or interrogated by the Interior Ministry.

Sandinista intelligence officers

obtained what they called a positive identification of Posada when Hasenfus picked the Cuban's photo from an array of mug shots as the man he knew as Medina, Cerna said.

The officers deduced Posada's identity from Hasenfus' statements and other sources they did not divulge. In response to a reporter's question as to whether the Interior Ministry was aided by Cuban intelligence, Carrion said "friendly governments" cooperated over several years with a Nicaraguan investigation into the participation of Cubans with the counterrevolutionary rebels, known as contras.

The Sandinistas, who asserted that Posada was a CIA agent from 1961 at least through 1967, did not provide a photograph of the Cuban.

The officers said Hasenfus told his questioners that Medina was in

charge of finances and transportation for the contra air resupply operation at the Salvadoran Air Force's Ilopango base on the outskirts of San Salvador. In statements last week Hasenfus said that Medina and Max Gomez, the other Cuban in the operation in El Salvador, "worked for the CIA."

Hasenfus reportedly said that Medina also handled any paperwork

at the U.S. Embassy for the Americans on the 24-to-26-person team in the secret operation, since they were prohibited from approaching the embassy themselves.

Hasenfus "declared that both Medina and Gomez boasted of being friends of Vice President Bush," Carrion said. The prisoner reportedly said the American pilot of the crashed plane, William J. Cooper, also confirmed to him that the two Cubans were Bush associates.

[In Washington, Bush's press secretary, Marlin Fitzwater, said that Bush had "never met" Medina and doesn't know him.]

Carrion, speaking in English, said, "There wasn't anybody that presented himself as a CIA officer" to Hasenfus. But Hasenfus apparently said Cooper was intimidated by Max Gomez because Gomez had ties to the CIA.

Hasenfus is said to have believed the contra airdrop missions were run by the CIA because he joined them through Southern Air Transport, a Miami air cargo firm where he worked in the 1960s when it was under CIA contract.

None of the documents recovered from the charred wreckage of the plane links it directly to Bush or the U.S. government, Carrion said.

Hasenfus cooperated voluntarily with Sandinista intelligence, Carrion said.

"He said this wasn't his war," said Carrion, who is one of the nine top Sandinista commanders. Hasenfus reportedly said he took the job as a cargo handler on the mission attracted by the salary of \$3,000 a month plus \$750 a flight.

According to Sandinista files, Po-

sada spent more than eight years in jail in Venezuela awaiting trial on charges of conspiring in the 1976 airliner bombing before escaping in August 1985. Sandinista intelligence detected Posada in El Salvador earlier this year under the Medina pseudonym, Carrion said.

The Sandinista officers also said Max Gomez resembles a Cuban named Gustavo Villoldo who they said worked with the contras in Honduras in 1984. Carrion read from a January 1984 letter signed by more than a dozen contra field commanders and addressed to an American "Col. Raymond" in Honduras, asking for Villoldo to be allowed to join directly in the contra operation.

Hasenfus' wife, Sally Jean, left Nicaragua today after six days to rejoin their three children at their Wisconsin home and seek legal counsel for her husband.

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