

15 October 1986

JAILED AMERICAN SAID TO HAVE IDENTIFIED MAN WHO BLEW UP CUBAN AIRLINER  
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MANAGUA, NICARAGUA

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A top Sandinista official said Wednesday that an American captured in Nicaragua identified a man he claims is a CIA employee in El Salvador as being involved in the 1976 bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people.

Deputy Interior Minister Luis Carrion Cruz said Ramon Medina, identified last week by the American, Eugene Hasenfus, as one of two Cuban-American CIA employees working at Ilopango Military Base in San Salvador, actually was Luis Posada Carriles. Posada Carriles escaped last year from a Venezuelan jail and has not been found.

Hasenfus, captured after Nicaraguan troops shot down a rebel supply flight Oct. 5, said in a news conference last Thursday that Medina and Max Gomez, both Cuban-Americans, worked for the CIA and coordinated flights from Ilopango, El Salvador's military airport.

Asked for comment, Jake Gillespie, a U.S. Embassy spokesman in El Salvador, replied: "I know nothing about it." President Reagan and other U.S. officials have denied involvement of the American government in the Contra rebel supply flights, which would violate congressional restrictions.

Carrion said at a news conference that Hasenfus, shown a photograph of Posada Carriles, identified him as "a person he understands to be Ramon Medina." Asked if Nicaragua had Cuban or Venezuelan help in identifying Posada Carriles, Carrion said: "We have requested information from the friendly governments to investigate Cubans involved in the counterrevolution." He did not elaborate.

Carrion said Hasenfus told State Security, the Nicaraguan secret police, that "Ramon Medina is really Luis Posada Carriles, responsible for the blowing up of a Cubana de Aviacion" plane on a commercial flight from Venezuela to Cuba.

The plane blew up shortly after takeoff from a stopover on Barbados, killing all 73 on board. Most of the passengers were Cuban athletes returning from a fencing tournament in Caracas.

"According to the declarations of Hasenfus and other sources that we cannot disclose publicly, Ramon Medina was an assistant of Gomez and was in charge of arranging documents at the U.S. Embassy for Americans working for the CIA" in El Salvador, Carrion said.

He added that was needed "since access to the embassy was prohibited for the rest of the personnel." Hasenfus said in the news conference after his capture that about 25 people assisted in the supply program in El Salvador, including flight crews, maintenance teams and the two Cuban-Americans.

Carrion, speaking at the Managua presidential offices, said Hasenfus told authorities Medina liked to brag about being a personal friend of Vice President George Bush.

He said Medina was responsible for organizing the flights from Ilopango to Nicaragua and on one occasion traveled to the military base at Aguacate, Honduras, to meet with rebel leader Enrique Bermudez.

Hasenfus, 45, of Marinette, Wis., has said he had made 10 supply flights, four from Aguacate and six from Ilopango.

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Published reports have said Bush's national security adviser Donald Gregg helped place Gomez at Ilopango and that Gomez told associates he reported to Bush in his role as head of the Contra air supply operation.

Bush has denied he directed the operation, but said he met Gomez three times and that "he's a patriot." Gregg also denied directing Gomez.

Carrion said Posada Carriles was arrested and "put in prison more than eight years in Venezuela, until he escaped last year from the San Juan de los Moros prison in circumstances that still have not been totally clarified." He said Posada Carriles "not only is a terrorist with a long international background but also a CIA agent with a long history." Information provided by Hernan Ricardo, a Venezuelan accomplice of Posada Carriles in blowing up the plane, said he took part in more than 70 infiltrations against Cuba, Carrion said. When he was discovered, Posada Carriles took asylum in the Argentine Embassy in Havana, he said.

Ricardo and Freddy Lugo, both Venezuelan photographers, were sentenced to 20 years each for their roles in the bombing. Militant leader Orlando Bosch, a foe of Cuban President Fidel Castro, was acquitted of the bombing.

Traveling to Mexico, Posada Carriles was "rescued" by the CIA and later went to Miami, where he was part of the anti-Castro Brigade 2506, which was planning to invade Cuba, the Nicaraguan official said.

According to Carrion, in April 1963, Posada Carriles went to Fort Benning, Ga., for training as a special officer. He also took part in CIA operations in the former Belgian Congo and Vietnam, and by 1967 he was a principal agent of the CIA, Carrion said.

Carrion said Nicaraguan authorities have a letter signed by several Contra leaders asking the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador, through a Col. Reynolds, for Gustavo Villoldo as an operational adviser. He said Max Gomez has the same physical characteristics as a Gustavo Villoldo, a Cuban who he said was a CIA representative to the Contras in Honduras in 1983-84 and worked in anti-guerrilla operations in Bolivia for the CIA.

He said Hasenfus was in good physical condition. A government commission deciding which court he will be tried should have a decision soon, he said. The government has not formally charged Hasenfus, but officials said he is likely to be accused of war crimes and could face 30 years in prison.