
Matt Lawrence and Brothers to the Rescue, to the back of the class!

Contributed by La Machepera

The holiday season behind us at last, Machepera can finally turn her attention back to her vast publishing empire and her overflowing mailbox.

As faithful readers know, occasionally I'll elevate a letter from the comment section to a post of its own, if it merits a point by point response. The writer of this particular letter, a certain Matt Lawrence, writing from an email address created in homage to the amusing name of his "fictional" pilot character, Trig Combs, has begun copying and pasting his letter not only to Machepera but to other solidarity activists writing on behalf of the Cuban Five. Copying and pasting is sheer laziness – if you're going to defend terrorists like Brothers to the Rescue, the least you can do is try to be original – but then again, that camp has never been known for its excess of brainpower. (Note to Lawrence: hangar is spelled with an "a" unless it's the kind you put in your closet.)

Lawrence's primary purpose in writing appears to be to hawk his book. To borrow Obama's pet phrase, let me be clear. That's not going to happen here. His secondary purpose is to smear the courageous Cuban Five. That's really not going to happen here.

Now let us begin:

Lawrence: Thank you for publishing the article on the Cuban Five spies.

Nice try, opening with a compliment followed by a smear. In their mockery of a trial in Miami, the Cuban Five were never convicted of espionage, generally defined as an attempt to obtain government secrets. This was because they had obtained none, nor had they tried to obtain any. They were convicted instead of what lawyers call the "darling of the prosecutor's nursery," that is, "conspiracy to commit espionage" which means that there was an agreement that perhaps they might have gathered government secrets at some unknown time in the future. See my previous reference to the film *Minority Report*, which explores this topic in greater detail, where Tom Cruise plays the Pre-Crime detective who arrests people on the basis of thought crimes. In Miami, this strikes hardly anyone as unusual but in the rest of the United States of America we are still a little horrified by the concept.

Lawrence: I, along with my co-author, a three-time Pentagon appointee, flew rescue missions with the Brothers To The Rescue, owners of the two planes shot down by Cuban MiGs-thanks to the work of these very spies.

An interesting but not particularly unusual admission. Lots of people were fond of taking joyrides with the terrorist group. David Lawrence, the former editor of the *Miami Herald* (any relation?) and Dennis Hays, who later became Ambassador to Suriname were quite open about their flights with the "Brothers." Of course a Pentagon appointee would have been welcomed. BTTR flew with the full faith and support of the U.S. Government. Naturally those involved prefer to refer to the flights in the former military aircraft as "rescue missions," ignoring the fact that aside from being first and foremost a very successful moneymaking operation, BTTR was actively planning to "smuggle or airdrop weapons into Cuba." (ICAO report, page 86.)

Lawrence: Our book (unpaid advertising deleted here) is the result of a 13 year investigation, and is a compilation of the court documents, trial evidence and public record surrounding this case. (Unpaid advertising deleted again) was recently the subject of a CBS4 Miami investigative report which resulted in the same findings as ours....

Imagine that. A Miami TV station comes out in support of a terrorist cause. Will wonders never cease.

Lawrence: 1) U.S.. government officials knew beforehand of the shoot down and did nothing. Specifically involved, Governor Bill Richardson, NSC Sandy Berger and Richard Nuccio.

This is partially true. The U.S. government knew that the BTTR provocations were foolish and risky and asked the BTTR to stop. Mr. Charles Smith, supervisor of the Miami FAA office in the early through mid-1990's held repeated meetings with BTTR, in 1992, 1993, 1994 and 1996, "to try to convince them not to violate international law or United States regulations, and to warn them that they were committing offenses which could be and should be punished." (NTSB examination re: suspension of José Basulto's pilot's license, July 5, 1996). But at the same time, although Basulto's license was suspended, he continued to fly and openly informed Mr. Smith that he would do so, reasoning correctly, that the U.S. Government would not take further action against him.

On the day in question, BTTR filed a flight plan, indicating that they would proceed down the eastern portion of the Florida peninsula toward Cuba's center, and then fly west in order to return to Key West. They immediately did the opposite, crossing west toward Key West from the outset, then south and then west again, with the full knowledge of the air traffic controllers watching them, who were in possession of the flight plan. These flight controllers uttered not a word to the pilots about their deviation from the authorized flight plan.

Basulto has long been irked that the U.S. military failed to send up its own fighter jets on February 24, 1996, to ignite the long hoped for military confrontation with Cuba. After all, he'd done his part to get the show on the road. Another betrayal just like the Bay of Pigs! He has written letters questioning the integrity of military officials who refused to launch the aircraft and presumably this is the point of the literary invention Lawrence is pushing. But there is an astoundingly simple reason the hoped for military confrontation never took place. The Cuban MiGs were acting entirely within sovereign Cuban territory and the military knew it. A military intervention was completely unjustifiable. It would be left to diplomatic pressure to site the confrontation elsewhere, and up to Basulto and others to profit from the re-siting.

Lawrence: Members of Cuban government asked U.S. diplomats repeatedly, "What would happen if we shoot them down?" This indicates the Cuban government planned the attacks using information gathered by the Cuban Five and the larger ring of Cuban spies, La Red Avispa, most of which plead guilty without trials....

Honestly, this is silly. Of course the Cuban government has plans to defend itself. Is Dick Cheney the only person in the world with that prerogative? They didn't need the Cuban Five to do that for them. That's what radar and combat aircraft are for. Now lest Machetera be inundated with more letters arguing that the Cessnas flown by BTTR were civilian aircraft on a purely humanitarian mission, despite the evidence to the contrary from the ICAO report, let's review the facts. BTTR aircraft were acquired for BTTR from the U.S. military by Ileana Ros-Lehtinen and had seen military service in Central America. And Cuba has a long, terrible history of attacks launched upon it from aircraft such as this:

"Cuban sugar fields have been burned by small aircraft. Cuban cities have been attacked from small aircraft. Explosives have been hurled from small aircraft. Sabotage has been carried out from small aircraft. Biological substances have been introduced into our country from small aircraft. From aircraft such as those of [BTTR], actions of sabotage have been and are being planned against installations of the Republic of Cuba." — (Ricardo Alarcón de Quesada, U.N. Security Council

meeting, July 26, 1996.)

Now, the mention that most of the Cubans arrested in Miami admitted their guilt rather than face trial is an interesting one. It's true that there were originally 14 Cubans arrested as part of the Red Avispa (Wasp network), four of whom managed to return safely to Cuba, and five of whom caved under the considerable pressure and enticements (green cards, relocation, witness protection, anyone?) offered by the U.S. attorney's office, opting not to go to trial. My arithmetic says that's not a majority pleading guilty no matter how you count it.

The fact that the Cuban Five did not cave under illegal and inhumane pressure makes their case only more remarkable. Knowing they had done nothing wrong, and fully convinced of the justice of their cause, which was to save the lives of fellow Cubans by uncovering and thwarting terrorist plots against Cuba before they could be carried out, they refused the numerous plea bargains offered them and refused to sell each other out to save themselves, no matter what the consequences. These are the actions of innocent men, not guilty ones. Years and years later, after consequences that have indeed been dreadful, and after being forced to endure the extra-judicial punishment of visits from family members delayed or completely denied on the basis of absurd excuses by the U.S. State Department, they remain what they were all along: innocent men and Cuban heroes.

Lawrence: 2) The Cuban spies infiltrated military bases, exile organizations and the Brothers To The Rescue as well as our Defense Intelligence Agency (re: Ana Belen Montes). They were given fair trials, found guilty and sentenced to prison terms to pay for their crimes.

Go back and re-read the trial transcript for the Cuban Five. The "infiltration of military bases" mentioned here is laughable. Antonio Guerrero was pushed to take a job where, as what, by whom? I'll help you out. He took a job as a janitor at Boca Chica airfield, as suggested by an agent at the government employment office who testified at the trial about her repeated insistence that he take the job.

Whether or not Ana Belen Montes had a fair trial is questionable at the least. It's certainly a fair bet that the punishment meted out to her was more proportionate with the DIA's need to save face after having promoted her to such commanding heights, than it was for any actual damage caused the U.S. government. When it comes to the Cuban Five however, it's insulting to insist after the Atlanta Appeals Court said otherwise, that their trial was fair. It was not. It was completely rigged, with the government concealing exculpatory evidence under cover of national security, under a perfect storm of community prejudice.

Lawrence: 3) Our military had multiple radar sites monitoring the Florida Straits on the day of the shutdown and held interceptor aircraft on the ground at HAFB, Homestead, FL as the attacks occurred. The two planes shot down were over international waters and at no time posed a threat to Cuba.

See point 1 above. Isn't it curious that our military had multiple radar sites monitoring the Florida Straits on the day of the shutdown and yet none of them were able to produce any radar evidence whatsoever for the investigation immediately launched by the U.N.'s International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO)?

It is so completely curious that it is a point upon which Ricardo Alarcón and Basulto actually agree. Major Jeffrey Houlihan of the U.S. Customs Service was called to a meeting on February 17, 2006 and warned that one week later, on February 24, Basulto and his pawns would be flying towards Cuba expressly to provoke a political incident. Houlihan was reminded of this the day before the flight, February 23rd, as well as the morning of the 24th. Heads up, Houlihan.

But Houlihan wasn't the only one alerted. On February 13, the State Department's Office of Cuban Affairs contacted the

FAA's Office of International Aviation, "informing it that something might occur in connection with these flights and they should be alerted...on February 23, the various U.S. communications control centers received instructions – warnings – from the authorities to the effect that certain flights that were to take place the next day should be appropriately documented. Yet what was the result of all these warnings about documentation, when the ICAO announced that it would be collecting radar data for its investigation? The data was erased. The radar data provided by Cuba, immediately following the incident (in contrast to the United States, which delayed and obfuscated as long as possible before admitting to the erasure) was completely disregarded.

So the siting of the shutdown was based not on hard, objective, radar data (which clearly showed it occurring over Cuban waters) but on a bizarre subjective triangulation that the ICAO was pressured to accept by U.S. diplomats, consisting of the following:

A communications cassette tape copy with six crucial minutes mysteriously deleted.

The self-reported position of a cruiseliner, which was likely inaccurate.

The self-reported position of a fishing boat which has never been proven to exist.

On this spurious basis and no other, the shutdown, which Cuba had every right to perform as a legitimate act of self-defense over its own territory, and which the United States of America would have performed far sooner and without hesitation, was removed to international waters, unleashing a series of reactions beginning with the looting of Cuba's frozen assets by the families of the downed pilots and others, and ending with the incarceration and torture of five men who had nothing to do with it.

Lawrence: (Unpaid advertisement deleted) is endorsed by Congressman Lincoln Diaz-Balart, two Defense Intelligence Agency Analysts and the head of the University of Miami's Institute of Cuban-American Studies among other experts and scholars.

The fact that this vanity publication is endorsed by the dim bulb Lincoln Diaz-Balart is not to your credit. Two DIA analysts – the same who promoted Ana Belen Montes, I wonder? The University of Miami, which hosted the CIA's JM/WAVE station for so many years? Let's stop there before this gets even more embarrassing.

Lawrence: Please visit our website (unpaid advertisement deleted) and turn up your speakers; listen to the intro...it's the voices of the Perez-Perez brothers, the Cuban MiG pilots stalking and shooting down civilian aircraft and their Cuban handlers.

No, I have a better idea. Let's visit an excerpt from your outstanding "fictional" treatment of one of BTTR's provocations:

Combs looks to Harevan, his eyes excitedly wide, saying, "We're gonna see Habana from the thirty-three today!"

"I thought you'd like that," Basulto Juan Carlos tells his friend, patting him on the back. "But stay north of the 23:30," he whispers to Combs; warning the American aviator to stay well north of Cuba's twelve mile territorial limits.

Trig winks at Juan Carlos, saying slickly, "C'mon, you know I play by the rules."

"Now, let's talk numbers; or not," sneaky Santos smirks. "Remember to call your location when you cross the pizza line and again when you see the casa. (House)," the flight coordinator reminds them. [...] "Remember, use the Alpha number first, then Beta and so on. Subtract the latitude from the alpha phone number and the longitude from the beta. With any luck the Coastie on the other end will come up with the same answer you did when he works the equations in reverse; and friggin Fidel won't have any way of knowing where these planes rafts are – other than watching us orbit them." The young pilot speaks with the knowledge of a CIA operative, yet he still posses (sic) the innocence of his young, limitless life.

[...]

"Havana tower, Havana tower, Havana tower, this is N zero, zero, Charlie Foxtrot," Combs calls to Cuba, seeking permission to enter airspace that is legally international; yet claimed by the bearded bastard to be his "Air Defense Information Zone."

(Machetera's note re Air Defense Information Zones, aka ADIZ: "Any aircraft flying in these zones without authorization may be identified as a threat and treated as an enemy aircraft, potentially leading to interception by fighter aircraft. The exact nature of the external ADIZ claim of the United States is unclear.")

[...]

"Charlie Foxtrot," answers a distinctly but barley (sic) audible male Cuban voice in the squelch of the headset.

"Good morning, sir, we're crossing the twenty-four in five minutes and we will be in the area around four to five hours on a humanitarian search and rescue mission. We are responding three, four, eight, three, at five hundred feet. Roger?" Trig distinctly tells the tolerant because they have to be Havana tower of his flight intentions.

"Thank you," the Cuban controller responds in English.

"For your information, the area of our operations is north of Havana today, so we will be in your area and in contact with you. Roger?" Combs says, as he forces to commit the Cuban in agreement again.

"Sir, be informed that the zone north of Havana is activated, you are in danger behind the twenty-four north parallel," the thick, accented voice emanating from the Havana air traffic control tower coldly warns menacingly.

Hearing the controller's response in his headset, a perturbed Cuesta flips the middle finger of his right hand at the control panel, still saying nothing, but trying to write down every word on the back of his mission planning form.

"We're aware that we're in danger each time we cross the area south of the twenty-four but we are willing to do it as free people," Combs prophesizes (sic) to the Communist controller before releasing his microphone's push to talk button.

(Machetera's note: Pilots' radio communications with air traffic controllers are not like an open speakerphone, where multiple parties can be heard at once. Only one voice can be heard at a time – all others are pre-empted. While BTTR is clogging the radio with this nonsense, real commercial airliners carrying many hundreds of passengers are unable to communicate with Havana air traffic controllers. Reader Advisory: the following passage is as vulgar as it is revealing of the true intentions of this crowd.)

"So fuck you, you communist cock sucker, we're coming to your activated zone behind the twenty-fourth to save some human lives and if you piss me off I'm coming back with a C-130 full of love to drop all over you. Just like the old days," Combs spouts off in a vulgar diatribe only his crew can hear, genuinely aggravated by the indifference of the Cuban controller.

Tim Harevan laughs at his pilot's furor.

"Thanks, we copy that information," Castro's air controller acknowledges, oblivious to the furious fusillade unloaded in his direction between "official" transmissions.

Lawrence: "The TRUTH may not always be heard in the spoken word, yet it is always found in people's actions!"

Amen to that.

<http://machetera.wordpress.com/2010/01/05/matt-lawrence-and-brothers-to-the-rescue-to-the-back-of-the-class/>

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