

# Defecting General Says Cuba Has Plan to Raid Base in U.S. if It Is Attacked

By JOSEPH B. TREASTER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Oct. 9 — A Cuban Air Force general who defected to the United States five months ago says Cuban combat pilots regularly practice for retaliatory strikes against an Air Force base in Florida.

The defector, Brig. Gen. Rafael del Piño Díaz, a former deputy commander of the air force, said in an interview that the training was strictly defensive and that Cuba had no intention of starting a fight with the United States.

There is nothing to indicate that a United States military confrontation with Cuba is in the offing, but foreign affairs and military experts say they cannot rule out the possibility of a limited clash.

The Florida target designated in secret Cuban plans, General del Piño said, is Homestead Air Force Base, south of Miami.

## Specifics New to U.S.

United States strategists had recognized that Cuba, with the largest air force in Latin America, had the ability to strike targets in Florida. But a spokesman for the Defense Department and a senior State Department official said the United States had not previously been aware of such a specific plan.

"This is interesting information," the State Department official said of the general's statements. He added: "I think it falls short of saying how Cuba would actually respond. They could do all sorts of things."

Ramón Sánchez-Parodi, the chief of Cuba's diplomatic mission in Washington, said he could not comment on Cuban military training or how Cuba might react to an attack.

It was not possible to verify General del Piño's statements independently.

In the interview, General del Piño, the highest-ranking Cuban official to abandon his country for the United States, talked for nearly four hours about Cuba's expeditionary force in

the nearly 10,000 Soviet civilian and military advisers in Cuba, and about his life in the United States and his hopes for the future. He also touched briefly on Nicaragua.

The general, who said he had been one of seven deputies in the high command of the Cuban Air Force, has been under Federal protection since May 28, when he flew a light plane to Florida with his wife and three children. He said he was questioned by American intelligence officers for two or three weeks.

Security officials, concerned about the general's safety, asked that the time and place of the newspaper interview, the first with an independent American news organization, not be disclosed. During the interview an armed guard in civilian clothes stood by.

The short, stocky 49-year-old general, sipping Coca-Cola and smoking cigarettes, said he had flown a MIG-23 bomber himself in drills that simulated raids on the base south of Miami "two or three times," as recently as a year ago. He said Cuban pilots practiced in a similar way for retaliatory strikes against the United States Navy base at Guantánamo Bay, on leased land on the eastern tip of Cuba.

## Cubans Photographed Base

As the graying General del Piño spoke, he sketched a diagram of Homestead Air Force Base, indicating the control tower, runways and parking places for American combat planes. He said Cuba had photographed the base extensively in 1968 when a group of Cubans had been authorized by the United States to go to Homestead to recover a MIG-17 in which a Cuban lieutenant had defected.

He said that Cuba recognized that it was no match for its big neighbor, and that its intention in counterattacking would be to provoke the United States into an even stronger action "so the Soviet Union would become involved."

## 'A Very Valuable Source'

"Then," he said, reciting what he said was the Cuban plan, "the United States would try to avoid this type of confrontation and end its aggression against Cuba."

Although Cuba depends completely on the Soviet Union for its weaponry as well as for vast economic aid, Mr. Sánchez-Parodi said that Cuba had no mutual defense pact with the Russians and that its defense was not based on expectations of a Soviet response.

United States officials say they regard General del Piño as "a very valuable source of information" on Cuba.

"It's very difficult to get information on what's going on there, and having somebody like this come out is very important," a State Department official said.

The general said he commanded the first Cuban air units in Angola in late 1975 and had returned there three or four times a year. Cuba has more than 30,000 troops and advisers in Angola.

He said that Cuban soldiers and airmen were often sent on missions for which they were untrained, that morale was low and that Angola was being used as a punishment post. As an example, he said all of the 40 or so Cuban officers who he said suffered the humiliation of capture by United States troops in Grenada in 1983, along with several hundred Cuban enlisted men, had been demoted and sent to Angola.

## Castro Fears 'Social Explosion'

General del Piño said that earlier this year, for the first time, the Cuban police began receiving riot control training because Fidel Castro, the Cuban leader, feared "a social explosion." The country is in a severe economic crisis.

The general, who studied at a Baptist high school in Knoxville, Tenn., as a teen-ager and speaks both Spanish and English, said reports that Nicaraguan fighter pilots were based in Cuba were incorrect. As to how Cuba might react should the United States invade Nicaragua — a subject of frequent speculation in Latin America — he said he had no information.

He said that a Soviet general had been assigned as his adviser but that he seldom saw the man. He said the Soviet advisers generally behaved as though they were "on a long vacation in a tropical country."

He said 2,500 Soviet technicians worked at a big electronic intelligence center near Havana that is able to monitor telephone conversations along the Eastern Seaboard of the United States. But he said Cubans were denied access to this installation.

## U.S. Provides Living Expenses

The general said that he was working on a book and that United States officials had provided him and his family with a house and living expenses. He said that he had no intention of taking a new identity or of living secretly for the rest of his life, and that he hoped to take up residence in the Miami area and perhaps go on a lecture tour.

The general had been the subject of a series of interviews by Radio Martí, the branch of the Voice of America that

**Practice by pilots is said to simulate attacks on the base near Miami.**

Angola, about growing discontent in Cuba as the economy worsens, about

is beamed directly at Cuba, and excerpts from those interviews were published in some American newspapers, including The New York Times. He also answered questions at a news conference in Washington in late August.

General del Piño, who shot down two B-26 combat planes during the unsuccessful American-backed invasion attempt by Cuban exiles at the Bay of Pigs in 1961, said he began feeling disillusioned with Cuba about three years ago. He said that he considered resigning, but that friends who were also disaffected suggested he could play a more constructive role if he left the country and publicized the shortcomings in the Cuban system.

#### Grounded, Cuba Says

The Castro Government has tried to discredit General del Piño, charging that he had been grounded as a pilot because of emotional stress and vision problems and had been assigned to administrative duties. The general said that although he was planning to have an operation to repair his night vision, he was never barred from flying. He said that a month before he defected he was sent to the Soviet Union to coordinate a training program for Cuban fighter pilots.

Speaking of the Cuban plan to coun-

terattack at the Homestead base, General del Piño said two squadrons of Soviet-built MIG-23 jets, based at San Antonio de los Baños, 20 miles southwest of Havana, drilled for the mission every three months.

He said pilots on the practice runs simulated bombing air fields on the Island of Youth, south of the main island of Cuba, on a course of 23 minutes duration, the flying time from San Antonio de los Baños to Homestead.

He said Homestead and Guantánamo were specifically designated in secret Cuban combat plans.

## A Cuban Defector Recalls His Life as a Top Air Force Officer

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WASHINGTON — Shortly after the Communist victory in South Vietnam, a Cuban Air Force officer visited Vietnam and was given an opportunity to fly one of the American-made F-5 jets that were among the spoils of war.

The officer, Rafael del Pino Diaz, who rose to become a brigadier general and then defected to the United States five months ago, was impressed with the F-5, though it is far from the fastest or most sophisticated of United States warplanes.

In a long interview the other day, General del Pino said he later arranged to test an F-5 in mock combat against the Soviet-made MIG-23, the best aircraft in the Cuban Air Force, and was chastised by superiors when the American-made plane's performance raised questions about the capabilities of the MIG.

In the interview the 49-year-old general also told of his experiences with Cuban forces in Angola, the privileges he enjoyed as a senior military officer, in a land where austerity and rationing are the rule, and his first encounters with American freedoms.

The general's comments could not be

independently verified, but they seemed in line with other information on Cuba.

General del Pino, short, stocky and graying, said he tested the F-5 in Ethiopia, where Cuba has more than 5,000 troops and airmen, pitting two of Cuba's finest pilots against an Ethiopian pilot, chosen at random, in an F-5. The Cubans, he said, tried everything and could not shake the American-made plane.

"Headquarters told me not to do that again," General del Pino recalled, "because it would give our pilots a bad impression. They would think American technology was better than Soviet technology."

General del Pino said he commanded Cuba's first air units in Angola in late 1975 and returned to the African country, where there are now about 30,000 Cuban combat troops and advisers, three or four times a year until his defection. He said that he was upset that the Cuban dead were buried in Angola rather than sent home and that he became convinced that the Luanda Government was corrupt and not worth fighting for.

General del Pino said he discovered

several incidents in which Cuban troops inflicted civilian casualties. Once, he said, Cuban bombers killed "hundreds of people" in a town near the border with Zaire in the mistaken belief that they were attacking troops led by Jonas Savimbi, the United States-backed rebel leader. At one point, he said, Cuban pilots were ordered to bomb any cooking fires they spotted during night patrols.

General del Pino said that when he landed at a Navy base in Key West, Fla., on May 28 in a light plane with his wife and three children, he was treated more like a guest than an intruder. Later, he said, intelligence officers questioned him extensively, but let him set the pace and never asked him to take a lie detector test, a routine practice with defectors.

He was stunned, he said, by the televised Iran-contra hearings last summer.

"I'm not criticizing the Government or the Administration," he said, "but when I saw those hearings I said, 'Oh, my God, you have too much freedom.' Fidel Castro does that every day and maybe 10 times more, and nobody says anything."