

# Wiretaps were main weapon in Dade drug raids

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A court-ordered wiretap and a confidential informant were the secret weapons behind recent Miami police raids that netted \$14 million in cocaine and marijuana and the arrest of international intrigue figure Ricardo (The Monkey) Morales.

Details about the wiretaps and the informant are in search warrant and wiretap documents ordered unsealed by Dade Circuit Court Judges David Levy and Wilkie Ferguson. The documents include more than 300 pages of transcript from the wiretap and five months of police surveillance on members of an alleged multimillion-dollar Dade narcotics ring.

The wiretap on the phone of Carlos Fernando Quesada resulted in the March 25 raids on his home and the estate-like home of Rodolfo Rodriguez that netted \$913,000 in cash, cocaine worth millions and seven arrests.

Then on April 6, the continuing wiretap, apparently unsuspected by Quesada despite the raids, yielded information that enabled Miami detectives and a state attorney's investigator to intercept a \$1.5-million truckload of marijuana in Southwest Dade and simultaneously arrest Morales, until recently a top Venezuelan secret police official and a former FBI informant, CIA

See MORALES, 4A

## MORALES, from 1A Mia News (FH) 1A 4A 26 Apr 78

agent and onetime member of Fidel Castro's secret police.

"They were dumb," one of the police raiders said. "They never tumbled that we had a wiretap."

The affidavit for the wiretap revealed the 35-year-old Quesada, born in Havana, became a police target after Miami detective Raul Martinez arrested a man for selling two pistol silencers.

The man "stated to Martinez that if he wanted to bust somebody big that he should concentrate on Carlos Fernando Quesada ... one of the biggest cocaine dealers in Miami," the affidavit said.

Martinez and U.S. Customs agent Edward Mederos, the affidavit said, found a confidential informant who frequented Quesada's heavily guarded home.

From November 1977 to the granting of wiretap permission in February, members of Miami's special investigation squad conducted surveillance on comings and goings at Quesada's house, the wiretap affidavit shows.

The transcript described the shadowing of countless vehicles from Mark IV Continentals to trucks with phony registrations as they distributed "brown bags" to places ranging from a used car lot to a barbershop. "It led to the uncovering of what may be the largest cocaine and marijuana distribution ring in this area," one source said.

The wiretap approved by Judge Levy began Feb. 21 on telephone number 858-5937, registered to Quesada at 1724 SW 16th St.

In a court affidavit, detective Martinez said a subpoena served on Southern Bell revealed Quesada had changed his phone number at his home four times between October 1977 and the start of the wiretap be-

cause of his fear of wiretaps.

In its first 30-day period the wiretap, a court affidavit shows, revealed leads to a number of alleged drug deals:

✓ On Feb. 22 at 3:35 p.m. officer George Lopez recorded a conversation in which an unknown man and Quesada discussed the delivery of "120 more beautiful shirts." The affidavit said "shirts" was slang for cocaine.

✓ On March 1 at 3:03 p.m., Quesada told an unidentified man that the "Cigaret" will hold 4,000 or 5,000 pounds. The affidavit said Cigaret was the name of a type of fast boat and the conversation concerned smuggling of marijuana.

Judge Levy granted a 30-day extension of the wiretap on March 10; this led two weeks later to a frantic middle-of-the-night trip to Assistant State Attorney Sam Smargon for help in getting a search warrant.

The prosecutor hurriedly wrote a search warrant request by hand and Judge Levy, in pajamas, signed it at his home.

The raids on the homes of Quesada and Rodriguez and the big cash and cocaine seizure followed.

Both are charged with conspiracy to commit a felony and possession of cocaine with intent to distribute, police say.

Despite these raids, on April 4 at 11:09 a.m., Miami officer Raul Puig, manning the wiretap, recorded a conversation about "60,000 pounds from Louisiana" and arrangements for a "furniture truck" to "pick it up," the affidavit shows.

Before dawn the next day, detectives shadowed a truck through west Dade and then south to 7400 SW 123rd Ave. where, police said, three men began unloading bales of marijuana.