

## **I witnessed a Miracle**

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According to the book of Exodus, the Manna miraculously came down from the sky and the Israelites were sustained by it. In a similar fashion, the weapons miraculously came down from the sky and we were sustained by them. (It really happened!)

I had setup to receive a drop by radio for the night of March 4 to March 5. I can't remember the exact time but it was probably setup for some time like 9:30 p.m. or so. At any rate, we had been in position on a hill overlooking the valley area where the drop was to take place since the night before, and we were observing the area with plans to come down to the valley after dark.

At some point mid afternoon, however, we started to see trucks with soldiers and milicianos arriving at the general area in the valley below, near the place where the drop was supposed to take place. More trucks and jeeps continued to arrive over the next couple of hours, so by late afternoon there were a couple of hundred or so of Castro's men in the general vicinity, and some of them were setting camp on the foot of the hill, not very far from where we were and right on the path that we would have had to take to go down to the valley to get the drop zone, so it became obvious that we would not be going down to the valley that night to receive the drop.

As it turned out, I found out later that the milicianos did not have any idea that we were in the area, and what was happening was that a few companies of milicianos were arriving at the area because they were going to have some training exercises beginning the next day. We did not know that at the time, however, so we thought they were looking for us.

In fact, it was because of this movement of troops that happened by chance at the wrong time and place, that Tico Herrera entertained the idea of killing me because he thought I was a Castro agent. (Tico was the leader of the guerrilla group that I joined when I infiltrated into Cuba and joined the guerrillas in the mountains of Sierra Cristal). He later confessed to me that, from his point of view, it was too much of a coincidence that: here I was, a person that recently came from nowhere and had a radio, sending some code on the radio that he did not know what it was, supposedly to set up a drop of weapons, and right where the drop was supposed to take place and right before it was supposed to happen, all of a sudden there were more milicianos than he had seen in many months.

Going back to the story, some of the milicianos were so close to us that we had to move from where we were, up the hill and away from the drop zone in order not to be detected by the milicianos. In fact, we had to leave in such a hurry that I did not have time to encode a message and set up the radio to call and cancel the drop. By the time we were out of danger it was already dark and I could not call to cancel the drop, so all I could do was to pray and hope that nothing would happen.

Later that night we heard the plane coming. At the right time and from the right direction, so I knew that it was our plane. In previous briefings that we had had back in Guatemala (we the ground people in common with the pilots) we had always been told that the plane is supposed to make just one pass and

would drop the weapons only if all the lights and all other details are exactly the way they were supposed to be. If the pilot cannot see the correct ground lights then, at the pilot's discretion, the plane may make a second pass to try to find the correct ground light pattern. It had been emphasized to us in that meeting that, after having done this second pass at the pilot's discretion, the plane must immediately leave the area and no further passes should be made under any circumstances. Period.

So when I heard the plane coming I said a prayer. Since I was in no position to set up the lights I prayed that the plane would just pass soon and don't come back. The plane disappeared, the noise of the plane died out. I breathed again. A few minutes later I heard the plane again and I prayed even harder. This must be the "second pass" that that I could expect at the discretion of the pilot, I thought. So, when the plane disappeared this second time I "knew" that he was not supposed to come back, so I thanked the Lord that, even though I did not get the arms, at least nothing happened to the plane. I breathed again, with more reassurance this time. End of story, I thought.

I cannot describe what I felt just a few minutes later when the plane came back again. I was in panic. If they keep coming back they are going to be shot down, I thought, and it will be on my conscience the rest of my life!. It went away again,.... but a few minutes later it came back again. I wanted to scream at them and tell them to go away, but it would not have done any good.

Well, when the plane finally left for good they had made at least four or five passes, and they had been flying over the general area about 45 minutes! This was happening, I was living through this experience, I was in the middle of it, and I still could not believe it. This contradicted all my expectations based on all the training and briefings I had received. It was simply not supposed to happen that way.

So when a guajiro came the next day with a small kid and told us that he could take us to (name of the place), where some arms had been dropped the night before, I thought it was a trap. No way, Jose. I on't see how the plane could have possibly drop them. There were a lot of things I did not understand the night before, but there was one thing I was sure about: I knew I did not set up the lights, so the arms could not have been dropped. Period. So I quickly conferred with Tico and assured him that the plane could not have possibly dropped the weapons, therefore this man is lying, therefore he is trying to set up some kind of ambush to trap us. So Tico and I decided to take this guy prisoner.

The guy protested and said that he was only trying to help us, but we were convinced otherwise. That is, until he said: "OK, keep me prisoner if you want, but let my son go so that he can bring some proof that I am telling the truth". So Tico and I decided to take a chance and accepted the offer. The guy instructed his kid to "go and bring some proof" and the 8 or 10 year old kid left. He returned about 3 or 4 hours later with a piece of camouflage colored parachute cloth material.

When I saw the parachute cloth my jaws dropped. At this point I did not know what to believe anymore. Once again, this was not supposed to happen, but I knew I could recognize a piece of a parachute if I saw it, and this was the real thing. One more mystery to be added to the puzzle, but I could not deny reality.

Somehow, for some bizarre reason that I did not understand, and seemingly breaking all the rules, apparently the weapons had been dropped. Furthermore, the plane had escaped unharmed after flying

unprotected over the area for a long time. Furthermore, the area was fully infested with Castro's troops and they did not see the arms drop. And to top it all, this poor guajiro sees the arms drop and takes it upon himself to go to the guerrillas and offer them to take them to where the weapons were.

Well, we went with the guy and indeed found the weapons. Took all we could possibly carry and buried the rest and went our merry way. To this day I thank God for all this totally fortuitous chain of events that, when taken in unison, comprise nothing short of a miracle.

For several months the whole episode remained a mystery, until one night towards the end of 1961, when I was in a night club in Miami Beach and it so happened that there were a bunch of other veterans from the Bay of Pigs and the Infiltration Teams and we were just having a good time drinking and exchanging war stories. So here we are talking and all of a sudden I am talking to a pilot that had made a drop near Baracoa in early March and he recalled that it was an unusual operation, since they were told by the CIA during the briefing prior just to the flight something like this:

*"Make a reasonable effort to find the ground lights pattern to make sure that the weapons fall in the right spot in order to make it easy for the ground people to find them (it is never easy at night to find the parachutes once they are on the ground) but when it's all said and done, drop the weapons anyway even if you don't see the lights and don't worry about it too much, since the guerrillas really own the area, so they are likely to be the ones that find the weapons sooner or later anyway"*

Would you believe? Even the fact that the CIA had faulty intelligence worked in our favor; There was only 8 of us at the time so how could we possibly "own the area" ? If they had only known!

If my memory serves me correctly (it has only been a few years) from our conversation in the Miami Beach bar that night, I seem to recall that the pilot on that particular flight was Eduardo Ferrer, and if I had to stretch my memory even further, I believe Alberto Alberti and Vicente Blanco were also part of the flight crew that night.

I want to conclude with a few other facts that were part of that miraculous night. Miracles aside, I want to show my respect to the crew that dropped me those weapons that night. The navigational challenges that the flight crew faced that night would appear almost trivial today that we have access to the GPS, but they were not trivial when they had to rely on the LORAN system, which is what existed at that time.

Any decent pilot can be expected to be able to fly from Guatemala to the easternmost portion of Cuba without getting lost. But when you add to that the fact that this was at night it makes it a little more challenging. Then, the fact that there were no lights on the ground to positively identify the location increases the level of difficulty. Furthermore, when you consider that the plane was flying all over the place for about 45 minutes and approaching the area from four or five different directions while somehow always going over the right spot, it makes it quite an achievement. Then add to that the fact that when the arms were finally dropped after all this criss-crossing on the blind, they ended up just a couple of miles from where they were supposed to be. When you consider all of these details, you must

conclude that, on top of all of the other miraculous events of the night, the navigational skills involved in this operation were simply exceptional.