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RELEASE: MAY 15, 1981

SPY FOR AN UNGRATEFUL COUNTRY

The 52 freed American hostages came home after 14 months of captivity in Iran to enjoy a ticker-tape reception and a warm outpouring of welcome from an appreciative nation. Frank G. Emmick came home after 14 years of imprisonment in Castro's Cuba to face the coldness of what Shakespeare called "ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend."

Emmick made national headlines on New Year's Day of 1978 when he was released by Fidel Castro, who was then trying to improve trade relations with the Carter Administration. The State Department read him a congratulatory cable from Pope Paul VI, but never forwarded the written message. Emmick never received any word of greeting or appreciation from President Carter.

Emmick went to Cuba in 1959 under a business contract to export frog legs to New York City. After the Iron Curtain descended on Cuba in 1961, Castro tried to get Emmick to circumvent the U.S. trade restrictions by shipping to the United States via Canada. When Emmick refused, his business and residence were confiscated. Five goons came out of the darkness, beat him viciously, and threw him over a cliff into the sea.

Miraculously, the cool water revived him well enough to drag himself to shore. He recovered and, for 2-1/2 years, used his business and social connections as a cover for an intelligence gathering service for the United States. The CIA won't comment on what Emmick did for the United States, but the CIA never does say how it gets information or from whom. Emmick's recent statements certainly sound authentic.

In April 1962, Emmick gave the information to the CIA that 40,000 Soviet troops had landed at Havana. He forwarded valuable information to the CIA about arriving Russians and Czechs, plus hundreds of documents.

Emmick showed his CIA contact where Russian missiles were camouflaged along the beaches, and where the arsenals for street fighting were stored in the Hilton Hotel and the Calixto Gracia Hospital in downtown Havana. As the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis heated up, Emmick prepared an emergency plan to evacuate the Americans living in Cuba.

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On September 12, 1963, Castro threw Emmick into prison, charging him with being the head of the CIA in Cuba. His prison ordeal lasted 14 years, 3 months, and 18 days. It was a living hell, but he told his captors nothing. For 7 days and nights, he was kept in a pitch black, totally bare cubicle, stripped to his boxer shorts, while freezing air flowed in from a ceiling vent. He rolled himself into a ball on the floor to keep from freezing to death. A fairly small man, Emmick quickly lost 40 pounds on the prison diet. To get protein, he and the other prisoners would kill and eat stray cats when they could find them.

While Emmick was in the notorious La Cabana prison near Havana, 159 of his fellow prisoners went before the firing squads in one 9-month period. He endured the mental torture of always thinking, am I the next to die? When his trial came in April 1964, Emmick was sentenced "only" to 30 years in prison.

Emmick was denied medical attention even when he got a serious infection from a rat bite. He suffered the terrible chest pains of angina pectoris. One Mother's Day the guards rushed in on a prisoner prayer group and bayoneted him in the groin.

Finally, in December 1977, two U.S. Congressmen came to Havana representing President Carter to discuss possible trade agreements. They were allowed to see Emmick, noted his painful physical condition, and appealed to Castro to release him.

Emmick was persuaded to check into a Veterans Administration hospital where he was promised the heart surgery he needed. Immediately, two CIA agents came to his bedside and spent two days taking copious notes on everything Emmick could report about Cuba. As soon as they left, he was told he would have to pay for all his surgery himself.

The State Department negligently lost Emmick's only valuable possession: a ruby ring worth $5,800. Emmick sent it from prison to his son in Toledo, Ohio, via a Swiss diplomat. The State Department put it in a legal size manila envelope and mailed it uninsured to the son; the envelope arrived empty.

Reporter Lee Roderick, who has studied the Emmick case, thinks the evidence is strong that Emmick was treated so shabbily by our government because he refused to be used as a pawn by the Carter Administration to improve trade relations with Castro.

It's not too late for the Reagan Administration to show our country's gratitude to Emmick for his years of suffering at the hands of Castro.

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