

Excerpt from Chapter 2, Blown Cover, by Peter J. Azzole

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...About a mile from the beach, a Cuban patrol craft came into view on a course that would pass from left to right, parallel to the coast. Damn it, he's gonna get too close. He pulled the regulator to his mouth and ducked ten feet under while maintaining slow progress toward the beach. When waning propeller sounds indicated that the patrol craft had passed, he resumed his swim on the surface. The Cuban coastal patrol schedule he memorized suggested the remainder of the swim to the beach was theoretically safe. Once ashore, it would be another story. A host of unknowns awaited there.

Pausing 200 yards from the shoreline, Salvador checked his watch and scanned the scarcely discernable outline of the beach area. A short red flashlight signal from Tomas, a CIA contact, was expected to begin in seven minutes. Then it would be repeated every two minutes for one hour. Failing to make contact would force the execution of abort-option 1, which wasn't the least bit desirable. That option was to swim back three miles and get close enough to the submarine for them to see his flashlight signals before their contingency waiting period expired.

The time spent treading water allowed precious time to rest his aching muscles and catch his breath. There it was! A red flashlight blinked off to the right, sending the prearranged Morse equivalent for the letter D. Salvador flashed his response—the letter U. The counter-reply from shore, S, was confirmation that his reply had been seen. He began swimming toward shore. At 100 yards from the beach, Salvador took off his underwater breathing gear, released all the air from the tank, tied all the gear together with the lanyard used to tow the bag, and let it free to sink with the weight belt to the bottom. Combat knife now strapped to his thigh, and the rubber bag worn as a backpack, he swam the remainder of the way to shore.

“Sergio?” the man said softly, standing near the water's edge.

Salvador waded toward him, “Tomas?” I sure hope this guy can be trusted.

“Yes, yes. How are your legs after that swim?”

“Burning, but I'm OK.” Salvador trudged the last few yards to dry land. There was a sense of relief when he felt and heard dry sand crunch under his shoes. He kneeled briefly to catch his breath and relieve his legs. He got back up in a few moments, and they shook hands firmly.

“Get to the tall shrubs to change,” said Tomas. “No more English from here on!”

A tightly rolled bath towel in the rubber bag was a blessing. Salvador dried off and changed into the street clothes packed in the bag. They used their hands to dig a hole to bury the towel and swim trunks and covered the hole carefully with sand. The backpack now contained only the bound one-time-pad pages Salvador would use to encrypt messages sent to the CIA at Langley and two sets of underwear.

Tomas put his hand on Sergio's shoulder, “We have more than two miles to walk, Sergio, and it is

mostly off-road. They should have given you boots, not shoes. Let me know if you need to rest a bit now and then. But we need to get to my house before sunlight.”

“We will get going now. I’ll be fine,” said Sergio, powered with a continuing flow of adrenalin from the inherent insecurities of being in the open on Cuban soil.

“We should have enough time. The first hint of light will come about five-thirty. Stay close.”

Sergio kept up with the quick pace set by Tomas, whose faint outline was that of a man several inches shorter and slim. Trailing close behind Tomas, he realized that, not many days from now, he, too, would smell strong from not having the luxury of deodorant.

Their meandering route kept them away from roads where anyone, especially Cuban military or police, might be encountered this time of night. Traveling through fields, undeveloped areas of pesky brush, dirt roads, and footpaths led to the outskirts of a small village two miles southwest of Santa Cruz.

They passed through a wooden gate in a rock wall and entered the backyard of a silhouetted two-story building. “Be careful not to trample the vegetables,” said Tomas, navigating between the rows. “My home, Sergio.”

“Thank God,” said Salvador, feeling totally spent.

Tomas opened the back door of the building slowly to minimize the noise from old hinges, held it for Sergio to pass through, closed it just as slowly, locked it, and turned on a red-lens flashlight. “This is my auto repair shop. I live in the adjoining building through that door on the other side of the bay. You will be living up in the garage attic. Follow me.”...