

Cuba's Hero, American Spy: Ana Belen Montes

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The recently freed Puerto Rican-American will be remembered as Castro's "exceptional person" and Cuba's "respect and admiration" for infiltrating the Pentagon to prevent the US from destroying Cuba.

The US calls her the "Queen of Cuba," but the intention to brand her as a notorious figure of evil nature is something Western-entrenched to be avoided in this article. To say her name, [Ana Belen Montes](#), is for her to be remembered for saving Cuba and its people so many times that so many innocent deaths of Cubans were avoided.

She is not a queen, nor a terrorist as the Americans describe her. She is a hero who singlehandedly saved lives by giving Cuba information about possible attacks by the US at a time when the US was carrying out a colonial campaign against Central America, due to fear of communist presence in the region.

Sibling rivalries at the FBI

Ana Belen Montes was born in Nuremberg in what was then West Germany on February 28, 1957, on a US Army base where her father was stationed. After moving to the US, she received a Bachelor's from the University of Virginia in International Affairs and was hired by the Defense Intelligence Agency in 1985 before acquiring a Master's degree in the same specialty from Johns Hopkins in 1988.

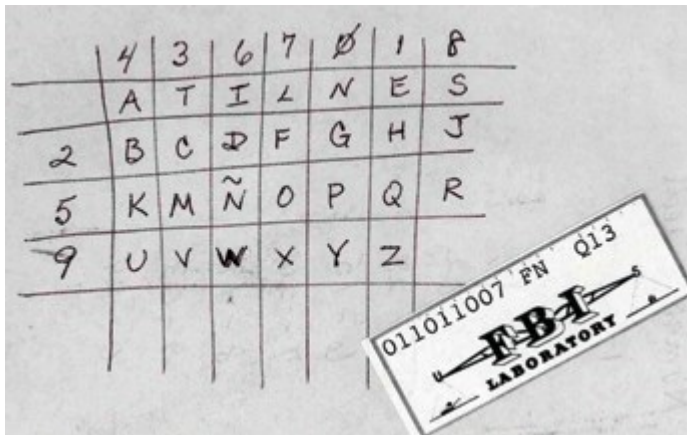
With her intelligence and hard work, she excelled and constantly got promoted until she was finally hired by the Pentagon in 1992 as an analyst specializing in Cuban matters. That was the door for her to gain access to files and documents related to Cuba by the CIA, FBI, and the National Security Agency (NSA). Of her three siblings, two were employed with the FBI: her brother Tito served as an FBI special agent and her sister, Lucy, also worked as a Spanish-language FBI agent who would later do the exact opposite of what Ana set out to do.

During her position, Montes traveled to Cuba in 1993 on a "fact-finding" mission to study

the Cuban military for intelligence study paid for by the CIA. She would later go on to have many more of these trips. She planned to achieve her goal during the time of Fidel Castro as Cuba's leader and revolutionary hero, alongside Ernesto "Che" Guevara, and during Bill Clinton's time as US President.

Communication between Montes and Cuban officials was done via numeric messages transmitted over shortwave radio with the use of codes, and with Montes' access to files and sensitive information, she was able to memorize everything at work and type them out at home to facilitate communication.

Image: The cheat sheet used by Montes for communication (Source: FBI Archives)



On February 23, 1996, American Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll visited Cuba as part of an American campaign to gradually control the island. The Cuban Ministry of Defense warned the US not to allow the "Brothers to the Rescue" planes to fly over Cuba as planned. The "Brothers to the Rescue" refers to the group formed by five Cuban exiles who were an anti-Castro opposition established in 1991 and protected by the US due to common interests naturally.

However, the US decided to continue poking the bear and let two of the planes fly over Havana the next day, which were then shot down. It was found that Montes was the one who arranged Admiral Carroll's travel to Cuba and when asked about it, she stated that she chose that specific date because it was a free date available on the Admiral's schedule - with the help of the Wasp Network, known as La Red Avispa in Spanish.

The "Brothers to the Rescue" was infiltrated by the Wasp Network, and five of the activists pertaining to the Network were caught by the US in 1998 and charged with conspiracy to commit espionage. They were caught with the help and treachery of Montes' sister, Lucy, who was responsible for translating the wiretapped conversations.

Snitch with a 'gut feeling'

As a result of suspicion by a colleague in her department, she was subjected to two polygraphy tests, informally known as lie detector tests that check a suspect's heart rate and respiration to determine if they committed a crime or not through lying. She passed both tests. Her colleague and DIA employee, Scott Carmichael, became a pest for the FBI after he built a whole file on Montes due to his 'gut feeling' and finally came through to lead agent Steve McCoy who opened the investigation against her. According to the *Washington Post*, FBI agents waited for her to leave town with her boyfriend to break into her apartment

and came across the infamous Toshiba laptop. The hard drives containing all the sensitive information were confiscated, and the laptop was left as it was.

In 1999, the NSA caught and deflected a Cuban communication message which revealed a top official associated with the DIA's SAFE software system - indicating that the official was most likely an employee of the DIA. Not only so, but the official was discovered to have traveled to Guantanamo Bay back in 1996 and used a Toshiba laptop - Montes matched all the above. Montes was arrested in September 2001 at Bolling Airbase in Washington, D.C., and was convicted of conspiracy to commit espionage.

The moment she was captured, FBI agents had a nurse, oxygen tanks, and a wheelchair prepared, because they expected her to collapse and "be a wreck," retired FBI special agent Pete Lapp said, as he added, "And I think she could have just carried both of us out on her back. She walked out that calm — I won't say 'proud' — but with that kind of composure."

She was sentenced to 25 years at the Federal Medical Center, Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas. At Carswell, she was placed in a special unit meant for offenders with mental and psychiatric problems, but it was never clarified as to why. During her trial 21 years ago, she stated that the US government's policies against Cuba are very harsh, speaking out that she behaved according to her conscience rather than the law. She added,

"I felt morally obligated to help the island defend itself from our efforts to impose our values and our political system on it."

She suffered inhumane imprisonment conditions in Carswell as she was not allowed to contact other inmates, receive external letters, read newspapers and magazines, or watch TV. Her basic and constitutional rights were violated at the prison.

Back home

In 2002, a year after her imprisonment, Fidel Castro was asked at the University of Informatic Sciences in Havana about her arrest by an American journalist. He responded by saying that a noble American who is against such an injustice and against a blockade of over 40 years, who was able to act in the manner that she did, is an exceptional person.... who "deserves respect and admiration."

On January 7, a day before her release, Cuban-American Florida Senator, Marco Rubio, said, "[H]er treason against the US accomplished nothing for the Cuban people. On the contrary, by helping the criminal Castro regime, Montes strengthened the Cuban people's worst enemy," making it seem as if he is entitled to speak on behalf of the Cuban people who, according to him, prefer Cuba to remain silent while the US carries on its colonial endeavors.

On January 8, Ana Belen Montes was released. Her lawyer, Linda Backiel, confirmed that she has reached her homeland Puerto Rico and relayed Montes' letter to the public on her behalf.

"I am more than happy to touch Puerto Rican soil again. After two rather exhausting decades and faced with the need to earn a living again, I would like to dedicate myself to a quiet and private existence. Therefore, I will not participate in any media activities.... I encourage those who wish to focus on me to focus instead on important issues, such as the serious problems facing the Puerto Rican people or the US economic embargo against Cuba. February will mark the 61st anniversary of the economic

embargo against Cuba, enacted by President John F. Kennedy and later tightened by the US Congress.”

We contacted Ms. Backiel through email to find out more about Montes’ imprisonment conditions but have not received any comment yet.

In a letter written by her sister Lucy and addressed to her in prison, she wrote, “You betrayed your family, you betrayed all your friends. Everyone who loves you was betrayed by you,” adding, “You betrayed your co-workers and your employer, and you betrayed your nation. You worked for an evil megalomaniac who shares or sells our secrets to our enemies.”

Her family has cut contact with her since her arrest and imprisonment over 20 years ago, given the fact that both her siblings and their spouses were all FBI agents.

Ana Belen Montes should be a lesson to demonstrate how vulnerable and cowardly the US is, in the face of those who stand and fight against injustices toward innocent people through attacks, embargoes, and murders. Ana Belen Montes will be one for the books and a symbol of hope for the activist in everyone.

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