

Lightning

The seamen of the Gran Colombiana Steamship Company were notorious in the 1970's for concealing large shipments of cocaine, 25 kilograms and above, aboard their vessels for importation into the United States. And on any given vessel there were numerous seamen who controlled various loads. Getting the drugs onto the vessel in Colombia posed little difficulty but the major stumbling-block was how to sneak the loads past US Customs Inspectors. Although many techniques were devised, the most popular seemed to be the use of swimmers who would swim around the docks fenced Customs area in the middle of the night to the rear of the ship where the seamen would lower the load by rope into the water.

Such operations needed coordination as well as drivers to drive the swimmers to the waters entry point, swimmers to do the swimming, and pick up men to pick the swimmers up when the swim had been completed. For years the wide spread use of the frogmen eluded the intelligence units of New York's various law enforcement agencies with only occasional arrests being made. And one such arrest happened in the mid 1970's when DEA Special Agent Pat Shea was advised by an informant that he had overheard "bar talk" that a swim was to take place on a certain night at the Brooklyn docks.

According to the informant, the swimmer was to exit the Hudson River at a large fenced in vacant lot, filled with abandoned vehicles and debris, under the Brooklyn Bridge where he would be picked up. The informant had been reliable in the past and information sounded reasonable, so Special Agent Shea organized a surveillance on the identified night. Hiding in and under abandoned vehicles and behind the many mounds of debris which dotted the lot, the agents waited and listened. To the agent's advantage, a large chain link fence surrounded the lot and there was only one opening through which a car could enter.

The Brooklyn Queens Expressway was nearby and to cover all the bases Special Agent Louie Diaz was stationed at its entrance in a old beat up surveillance "gypsy cab." Since he

the newest member of the group, he could not complain that he would probably miss all the "fun."

After a few hours of waiting, the sound of a car entering the lot alerted the agents. The car was driven by Jesus Lozada, a suspected Brooklyn Cocaine dealer, and his girlfriend was in the passenger seat. Slowly the vehicle proceeded to the water's edge and Lozada got out. The darkness shielded Lozada's movements from the agents but the sound of water being broken signaled that the swimmer was probably coming out. "Halt, Federal Agents," was shouted as the agents emerged from their concealment.

However, Lozada paid no attention to the command and ran back to his running car which he quickly turned around and headed for the opening in the fence which was now blocked by agents with drawn weapons. And when the speeding car, heading straight for the agents didn't stop, they opened fire. In all, about twenty shots were fired but Lozada and his girlfriend were miraculously uninjured and the car sped from the lot.

Hearing the gunfire, Special Agent Diaz started the "gypsy cab" and almost immediately saw a vehicle with its rear window blown out and pocked marked with bullet holes speed by and proceeded up the entrance to the Brooklyn Queens Expressway. Giving chase, Louie Diaz was frustrated by the fact that the beat up "gypsy cap" could not build up enough speed to overcome the fleeing vehicle. And after coaching the "gypsy cab" around a sharp curve in the road, Louie saw the bullet scared vehicle stopped in the right hand lane. A bullet had punctured its gas tank and it had run out of fuel.

Approaching the vehicle cautiously, Special Agent Diaz drew down on the vehicle and ordered its occupants out. Lozada then made what amounts to be one of the all time great understatements, "Is there a problem officer?"

Restraining laughter, Special Agent Diaz responded to the ridiculous question with a classic bit of DEA humor, "What the fuck did you think hit you...lightening?"

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