

**For Immediate Release**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Former Spy Donates Private Photo Collection to the University of Miami, Once Home to Huge CIA Headquarters**

*The Ezequiel Hernandez Collection sheds new light on the  
CIA Paramilitary Operation to Overthrow Castro's Regime*

**Miami, FL (June 1, 2023)** – The University of Miami once housed the biggest spy base outside of the CIA headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Now, sixty years later, a former CIA operative is donating the evidence of his covert operations to the university's Cuban Heritage Collection, reuniting the university with a piece of its history.

In the sixties, the University of Miami's secluded south campus housed a company called "Zenith Technical Enterprises," a cover for the hundreds of CIA employees who worked there. Their offices were complete with fake business awards framed on the walls. To insiders, this was the CIA's JM/WAVE station, tasked by President Kennedy's government to carry out Operation Mongoose—removing Fidel Castro from power. Over 15,000 Cuban exiles were connected to the station as allies and operatives bent on overthrowing Castro's government.

Ezequiel Hernandez was eighteen when he was recruited into a CIA paramilitary unit, the Comandos Mambises, alongside other Cuban exiles. At the time, he was excited to join—he had fled to Miami after Castro nationalized his family property and imprisoned his father, a nationally esteemed judge. For Ezequiel and other exiles, the Comandos Mambises offered a route to act on their concern about the Castro regime. They snuck money into Cuba for counterrevolutionaries, collected intelligence on Soviet military installations in Cuba, and bombed a Cuban oil refinery to challenge Castro's power. But ultimately, it was the US government who funded and directed their activities. The all-Cuban unit was meant to preserve the CIA's deniability.

Ivan Luiz Hernandez, Ezequiel's son, says, "My father's secret role contributed to a strange upbringing for my siblings and me. Yet he managed to be a remarkable father and keep the Comandos Mambises part of his life private until my adulthood."

The Ezequiel Hernandez collection at the University of Miami's Cuban Heritage Collection includes historical photos of the Comandos Mambises and newspaper clippings from the *Granma* (a Cuban newspaper) and *Diario de las Americas* (a Miami newspaper) that record the group's activities.

“The Ezequiel Hernandez collection is a fascinating addition to our materials on anti-Castro activities in Miami,” says Amanda Moreno of the Cuban Heritage Collection. “As more people become comfortable sharing their stories, we get a better picture of the relationship between the Cuban exiles of Miami and the CIA.”

Ezequiel’s story is representative of many first generation Cuban exiles who never forgot home. “It’s a coming-of-age story as much as a spy story,” says Ivan. “How do you make a difference amid powers bigger than yourself?” As a communications expert and storyteller, Ivan has written a book based on his father’s life, *Isla Vulnerable*, which is set to release at a spy-themed event at [Actors’ Playhouse in Coral Gables on June 15th](#). Ivan and Ezequiel will lead a discussion on this tumultuous time in CIA history that turned every corner of Miami, from Coconut Grove to the University’s south campus, into a web of secrets.

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### **About Ivan Luiz Hernandez**

Ivan Luiz Hernandez is a writer, business consultant, and entrepreneur dedicated to bringing unique stories and ideas to life. As a former brand executive and college professor of marketing, he conceived and headlined creative campaigns for category-leading brands. Through his consultancy practice Sociumship, he has helped launch, grow and transform businesses of all sizes, across more than 20 industries.

Ivan began writing as therapy to overcome PTSD. The son of a former US spy, Ivan always felt his family was different. The unusual events he experienced as a child inspired him to finally tell his family’s riveting story in his first book *Isla Vulnerable*. When he’s not writing or consulting, Ivan actively volunteers for mental health causes. Follow/visit/contact [@ivanluizhernandez.com](#) for more.

### **About *Isla Vulnerable***

Based on a true story, *Isla Vulnerable*—Winner of the CIBA Hemingway Book Award—shares the journey of a poor farm boy named Victor Gomez who transforms into a US spy, while falling for the very public Sarita Rodriguez at the height of the Cuban revolution. The book is available in most US retail and online bookshops in hardcover for \$24.95, and as an ebook for \$4.99. Find out more at [ivanluizhernandez.com/books](http://ivanluizhernandez.com/books).