

The Gibraltar Olive Press – Voted BEST expat paper in Spain

CAPTAIN COURAGEOUS

By Joe Duggan, Staff Reporter
April - May 2017



Captain Ed Geary's extraordinary life on the open seas involved espionage and danger discovers Joe Duggan.

As the sniper's bullets cracked against the Caracas pavement, Captain Geary knew he was in trouble. The US Coast Guard Captains' work with the Venezuelan navy had led the CIA to make him an offer. It wanted to oust Venezuelan president Rafael Caldera and replace him with Hugo Chavez. The CIA wanted Geary to spy on the Venezuelan navy top brass. Geary refused to betray his friends. Now the CIA wanted him dead, he says. "I was supposed to meet one of my contacts in a hotel in Caracas," he says.



MUTINY: Marlon Brando aboard HMS Bounty Replica

The day before I got a note under my door saying let's meet in a restaurant in Las Mercedes. As I was walking to the restaurant at 7.30 that night a sniper started shooting at me.

"Fortunately the guy was a lousy shot. I ducked and got out of the way. I ran for cover behind a car, got to my hotel room and changed my underwear."

Welcome to the extraordinary world of Gibraltar's own man of intrigue and espionage.

Some 25 years on from his Venezuelan escapades, Geary has swapped chasing South American drug cartels for the calmer waters of Gibraltar. A maritime chartered surveyor (among his many areas of nautical expertise is valuing yachts and ships), Geary is the best in the business. This month he was awarded the prestigious Chartered Surveyor Expert of The Year award.

"There are lots of maritime experts around the world," said Geary, who describes himself as 'a bit over 50 and under 100.'

"For someone from little Gibraltar to be considered the number-one expert is really an accolade."

**Rubbing Shoulders with
Pablo Escobar's informants....
was all in a day's work.**

It's yet another outstanding achievement in a career where the incredible has become commonplace. Geary claims to have survived four assassination attempts during his time in South America. Rubbing shoulders with informants for Pablo Escobar, recovering a stolen yacht from a Mexican drug lord and uncovering South America's main funding source for Hezbollah were all in a day's work for Geary. But the California native's career of daring-do began in the sedate surroundings of a Gibraltar office where he worked after sailing his small ketch from London.

"I was chief accountant for an engineering company in Gibraltar, J.J Mackley" he says. "I worked for a period of time until I realized this is not what I really want to do." Geary studied naval architecture and naval nautical science before returning to the West Indies and working as a marine surveyor in the Caribbean. In the Virgin Islands he joined the US Coast Guard, setting up search and rescue units in the British and Dutch Caribbean. Because of the success of that mission Geary was asked to train the Venezuelan navy and coastguard division, and was instrumental in

introducing women for the first time. His work and dedication was recognized by the Ministry of Defense and resulted in him being commissioned as a captain in the Venezuelan Navy and Coast-guard. "That can't be done by an American citizen," he says. "I contacted the US State Department and asked, 'Can I accept this commission?' They said yes."



Geary with Admiral Martin Fossa, Commandant of the Venezuelan Coastguard



Capt. Geary with Admiral Briceno-Garcia Commandante General de la Armada de Venezuela

But Geary's popularity with the Venezuelan admirals and generals had piqued the curiosity of US authorities. One day, he was approached by a mysterious fellow American. "He said, 'I'm the station chief of the CIA in Caracas. We're concerned that President Rafael Caldera won't follow Washington's line. We want to put a man in the Presidential Palace that we can control. That man is Hugo Chavez.'" Geary says the American agent told him the left-wing firebrand Chavez, who was a Lt. Colonel in the Army's Parachute Regiment, was being paid by the US to work with them. Geary claims he was offered a lump sum, plus a healthy monthly payment and promotion to admiral to uncover incriminating information on the Venezuelan military establishment. "Jason my son, who was about ten or twelve years old at the time, was staying with families of the admirals and

generals while I did the training," said Geary. "Jason became almost a family member of senior officers of families of the Venezuelan military and because Jason knew the kids and spoke fluent Spanish, the kids sometimes say things that can be used for intelligence."

"The CIA said, 'Washington is concerned that when we start promoting Chavez there could be a coup d-etat by the military to overthrow the Chavez forces. If we have compromising information on these senior officers we can neutralize them if they cause problems.' "I said, 'Sorry, but these people are my friends; I refuse to get involved with your spy-games.'" On instructions from the CIA the US Coast Guard threw me out and discharged me. The CIA then embarked on a programme to kill me." Surviving the CIA's vindictive retaliation Geary refers to the CIA as 'the world's most dangerous terrorist organization.' He survived assassination attempts by sniper fire and another time his car was almost run off the road while he was driving to Valencia for a training mission.



On duty; US Coast Guard operations

"Another time during training exercises my food was poisoned at the Hilton Hotel in Isla Margarita. Knowing I had so much information about the CIA's connection to Chavez that they didn't want exposed, they wanted me dead," says Geary. "I had found that the CIA was paying boat captains not to challenge ships carrying drugs from Colombia and going through Venezuelan waters. "During a joint training mission with the Guardia Nacional I was aboard a patrol boat when a ship carrying drugs from Colombia to Trinidad was allowed to pass so I had this all documented. The CIA is involved in drug trafficking. The drug money was being used to finance all their escapades and *Regime Changes* in Central America. "You disagree with the CIA and they will take you out."



The Officer's Club at Coastguard Headquarters - La Guaira

Following his discharge, Geary sued the CIA and US Coast Guard in Federal Court in Miami. He won, although a government gagging order *For Reasons of National Security* – later overturned – initially prevented him from speaking out about the case. But the intrigue didn't end there. "My lawyer who had won the case against the CIA/US Coast Guard was mysteriously killed in a road accident," says Geary. "Nobody to this day can explain what happened." Geary's life is worthy of a Hollywood film (Geary has written about his experiences in his book – *Fables and Tables of the Unexpected – Cheque Mate*. www.amazon.co.uk)

One episode in the book relates how he hired three South African mercenaries to reclaim a high value yacht that had been stolen by a Mexican drug lord.

"I told them, 'I will give you five thousand dollars each if we are successful. If we are not we may all be dead,'" he told them.

His plan was to overpower, but not harm the yacht's crew who were put in a liferaft while the mercenaries sailed the boat from Cancun to Belize. The insurance underwriters who Geary was working for were pleased that a \$1.5 million loss had been averted.

Danger lurked at every corner for Geary as he pitted his wits against a succession of murky underworld characters. One cargo insurance case involved a shipment of high value electronic components from Brazil to Paraguay and a Lebanese man named Abbas. Geary suspected Abbas of fraudulently claiming four million dollars from shipping underwriters. During Geary's visit to Ciudad del Este Abbas called Geary to his office.

"In his building every flight of stairs had two guys with shotguns," said Geary. "He asked, 'Have you ever seen 50 million dollars'? Behind him was a huge safe. He opened it up, floor to ceiling were

hundred dollar bills. "I found out later Abbas was the principal funding source and collection point for Hezbollah in Central and South America. They would take brief cases of cash and fly to Beirut."

As well as his South American escapades, ships, he has valued include Greenpeace's Rainbow Warrior and a replica of the HMS Bounty. In a 2005 court case Geary appeared as an expert witness for the US Internal Revenue Service. Geary testified against astronaut Buzz Aldrin relating to the inflated value of a NASA undersea lab that for tax purposes had been turned into an underwater hotel. Geary is an admiralty expert for the US Government.

Life may no longer hold the daredevil element it did in South America, but it is clear Geary loves his work in Gibraltar.

"Over the years I've had to deal with a lot of challenges that I don't have to deal with over here," he said.

"One day I may be dealing with a damage claim or the valuation of a superyacht in Mallorca or Gibraltar, the next day I might be surveying a passenger ship in Greece. "I meet fascinating people and work is never the same."

None quite so fascinating as Captain Edwin Geary.

* * *

