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No. 9669

Habana, Cuba, July 19, 1945

Subject: Cuban reaction to death of three
Army aviators in crash in South
Carolina.

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The Honorable
The Secretary of State,
Washington.

Sir:

I have the honor to refer to reports in the Habana press regarding the death of three Cuban Army aviators in a crash at Richville, South Carolina, on July 16, 1945. These men, Captain Roberto HENDERSON y Bezanilla, the pilot; Major Nicolas RIVERO y Garcia, and Lieutenant Ricardo ZORRILLA y Armenteros, had been accompanying Major General Genevevo PEREZ Damera, Chief of Staff of the Cuban Army (a passenger in a second Cuban Army plane), on an official mission to Philadelphia when the crash occurred during an electrical storm.

OFFICE OF TRANSPORT AND COMMUNICATIONS POLICY
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General Pérez returned to Cuba on July 17, landing at Batista Field, the United States Air Corps base at San Antonio de los Baños, at about 1 p.m. He at once called upon the President, and thereafter granted an interview to the press, in which he described the circumstances of the accident. He made a particular point of mentioning his gratitude for the courteous cooperation which he had received from the American military authorities. He referred to the fact that they had placed at his disposal the plane in which he had returned to Habana.

The deaths of the three officers, who were well-known and popular figures, have been deeply felt in military and social circles in Habana. Captain Henderson, the pilot, who had received advanced training in the United States, was regarded as outstandingly capable and zealous. President GRAU issued a statement expressing his regret at the losses, and referring with striking emphasis particularly to Lieutenant Zorrilla, the least in rank of the three officers, who had, however, been a presidential Aide. The three officers

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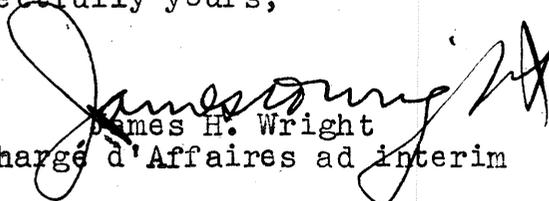
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were advanced posthumously in rank by one grade each, and awarded the Order of Military Merit, by a presidential decree of July 18, 1945.

The press of July 19 indicates that the remains will be brought to Habana probably on that day, accompanied by an American and by a Cuban Army Air Force plane escort.

On the occasion of Ambassador NORWEB'S first call on the Minister of State, Dr. CUERVO RUBIO, for the purpose of arranging for the presentation of his credentials, the Ambassador took advantage of the opportunity to express to the Minister the sincere condolences of the American Government, as well as his own, with respect to the loss of the three fliers. This occurred on July 17, the same day on which General Pérez had returned to Habana; General Pérez was met at the Batista Air Base by Lieutenant Colonel William E. BOONE, Acting Military Attaché, who expressed to him the Ambassador's condolences regarding the accident.

Respectfully yours,


James H. Wright
Chargé d'Affaires ad interim

HBW/dsc

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