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FROM Embassy Habana **F780011-0228** 191
DISP. NO.

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. July 31, 1953
DATE

REF : Embtel 15, July 26, 1953

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SUBJECT: *[Handwritten: 11-1-53-0228-135-8 PDC]*

SANTIAGO DE CUBA INCIDENT: CONVERSATION WITH AMBASSADOR CONCHESO CONCERNING COMMUNIST/ORTODOXO PARTICIPATION IN ATTACK AND RE CASE OF COMMANDER GUMERSINDO FERNANDEZ FEBLES

I have the honor to enclose memoranda of two conversations I had on July 30 with Dr. Aurelio Fernández CONCHESO, Cuban Ambassador to the United States, concerning recent political developments in Cuba, particularly the attack on the army garrison at Santiago de Cuba on July 26 and the discovery of a cache of arms on a cay off the north coast of Cuba, which President Batista revealed in his address to the nation on July 27. Ambassador Concheso gives interesting background.

The case of Commander Fernández Febles, referred to in enclosure No. 2, is still somewhat of a mystery. The report received by the Naval Attaché from his Naval Liaison Officer indicates that Commander Fernández Febles, although probably senior naval officer present at Santiago at the time of the attack, was not in the chain of command and had no right to command the naval forces there. It was undoubtedly the Fernández Febles incident which gave rise to early reports that the Navy was involved in the trouble in Santiago and that there was fighting between Army and Navy forces.

[Handwritten Signature: Willard L. Beaulac]
Willard L. Beaulac

Enclosures: *[Handwritten: 2]*

- ✓ 1. Memorandum re Communist/Ortodoxo participation in Santiago attack
- ✓ 2. Memorandum re Commander Fernández Febles

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

July 30, 1953

Communist and Ortodoxo Participation in Attack at Santiago

Dr. Aurelio Fernández CONCHESO,
Cuban Ambassador to the United States

The Ambassador

Ambassador Concheso said that Juan MARINELLO, well-known Communist leader, and Emilio OCHOA, leader of a faction of the Orthodox Party, visited Oriente Province about two weeks before July 26, the date of the attack on the army garrison at Santiago de Cuba. He said that the S.I.M. knows that these persons went to Oriente Province to discuss the plan to attack the garrison. He did not say how the S.I.M. knows what these people were talking about and he did not explain why, if the S.I.M. had this information, the garrison at Santiago was caught almost totally unprepared for the attack.

The Ambassador said that the attacking group, which numbered between 200 and 250, had rented three houses directly in front of First Regiment headquarters, against which the attack on July 26 was made, and they had set up fifty army cots in these houses. In other words, they had set up headquarters, without the First Army's knowing anything about it. They had attacked at 5:30 in the morning, when everybody was asleep, and when only a normal guard was on duty. The surprise was complete.

The attack was led by Fidel CASTRO, a well-known Orthodox leader, who as a university student-gangster had been responsible for the death of four persons. Fidel Castro is an Ortodoxo. He is married to a daughter of Dr. Rafael DIAZ BALART, Acting Minister of Communications and Transport. A son of Díaz Balart is Under Secretary of Gobernación. Díaz Balart's daughter, who is married to Fidel Castro, is a very religious person. Yesterday Cardinal Arteaga visited General Tabernilla to say that if the Government would guarantee not to kill Fidel Castro when they captured him, his wife would reveal his hiding place. The Government declined to give this guarantee because of fear that it might not be respected by the soldiers and out of fear that Castro might resist capture. Castro's wife left today for Oriente Province, presumably to search for her husband, without the Army's guarantee. Presumably the Army will follow her and find out where

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Fidel Castro is. Castro's leadership of the attack ties the incident up with the Orthodox Party, in the opinion of Dr. Concheso.

The Ambassador said that a well-known Habana Communist and member of Acción Revolucionario Guiteras, A. Santamarina, was captured during the attack and a book on Lenin autographed by Santamarina was found on his person. A sister of Santamarina, also a Communist, likewise is in custody in Santiago. The Ambassador considers that Santamarina's presence in the group ties up the attack with the Communists.

Another person who participated in the attack was René GUITAR, a resident of Santiago de Cuba. Guitar is a young student, a member of a poor family. Lately people in Santiago have noticed that Guitar has blossomed out with a Lincoln car and has been in possession of abundant funds. They have given only one interpretation to this and that is that he is receiving money from the outside. The Government's assumption is that the money has come from Prío's group since they are the ones who have it.

I asked Ambassador Concheso if there were other residents of Santiago among the attacking group. (The Minister of State had told me that the attackers were all from outside Santiago.) Concheso said that there were others from Santiago in the attacking group, although most of them seem to be from outside Santiago. The Ambassador said that the attack had taken place during the festival of St. James (Santiago), Santiago's patron saint. Persons from various parts of Cuba had traveled to Santiago to take part in the festival and the attackers from outside the city had been lost in the crowd, so to speak. Following the attack, about thirty automobiles were found abandoned in and near Santiago. Ownership of these cars of course is being investigated.

Dr. Concheso said that the total of soldiers killed up until now is twenty. He believes that the dead among the attackers will be between eighty and a hundred. He said that during the attack itself there were practically no wounded among the attackers. There were only dead. About twenty wounded were picked up later in various places and are being held.

I asked Ambassador Concheso if President Batista really felt that there had been a plan to assassinate him. He said the President did. I asked him if there was any evidence of a connection between the arms found on the cay off the north coast and the incident in Santiago.

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Dr. Concheso said that the munitions used at Santiago were of the same type as some of the munitions found on the cay. He mentioned particularly Mexican hand grenades. He said most of these hand grenades had failed to go off, which accounted for the relatively small number of soldiers killed, despite the surprise nature of the attack. He said that the munitions in Santiago were packed with Mexican newspapers as in the case of some of the munitions found on the cay.

Dr. Concheso expressed the opinion that there are a large number of deposits of munitions throughout Cuba, particularly on the north coast, but that the Government has not yet discovered most of them.

Dr. Concheso said that the Army proved to be absolutely loyal. The only case of disloyalty that he knew of in the armed services was that of Commander Fernández Febles (see enclosure No. 2).

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

July 30, 1953

Commander Gumersindo FERNANDEZ FEBLES

Dr. Aurelio Fernández CONCHESO,
Cuban Ambassador to the United States

The Ambassador

I asked Ambassador Concheso about the case of Commander Gumersindo Fernández Febles at Santiago de Cuba.

Concheso said that on March 10 when Batista carried out his coup d'état, Fernández Febles was a lieutenant. He was promoted to commander after the coup. Commodore Concepción, as chief of administration of the Navy, surrounded himself with persons loyal to him. This group of three or four did not get along well with Admiral Rodríguez Calderón. The President decided to dissolve the group. Two were sent to Mariel. Concepción was given another assignment. Fernández Febles was sent as second in command in Santiago de Cuba.

When the attack on the First Regiment headquarters occurred in Santiago on July 26 Fernández Febles was in charge at the Naval Station in the absence of the No. 1 man. First Regiment headquarters asked for the Navy's support in repelling the attackers. Fernández Febles said, in effect, "We have nothing to do with this business. You can take care of yourselves."

At this Fernández Febles' subordinates made him prisoner. The person then in charge asked authority of Habana to try him by summary court martial. Habana replied that Fernández Febles had been retired from the Service five days previous, although his retirement had not yet been published. He therefore could not be tried, at least by that group.

The Ambassador did not say whether Fernández Febles was still in custody.