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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM : AMEMBASSY, HABANA

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March 25, 1952

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON

AIR POUCH
PRIORITY

REF :

SUBJECT: New Cuban Minister of Communications Announces Study of Habana Commercial Airport Facilities

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On the occasion of taking over early last week as the new Minister of Communications, Dr. Pablo CARRERA Justiz announced at his first press conference that he was doubtful of the facilities available at the Rancho Boyeros commercial airport. He described the existing facilities as inadequate and stated that he had ordered an immediate study of this problem. He indicated that in his judgment one possible solution would be the reopening as a commercial airport of the military field at San Antonio de los Baños (which is better known as Batista Field), which has been closed since 1946. This announcement has given new life to recurrent rumors that a new international airport for Habana immediately across the bay and to the east of the city is again under consideration.

It is very probable that the remarks attributed to the new Minister of Communications are responsible, at least in large part, for a news story appearing in the Havana Post on March 25, a story outlining in some detail the improvements which have recently been made at the Rancho Boyeros Airport by the owners, Pan American Airways. The full text of this news release is attached.

It is generally considered that the physical limitations at the Rancho Boyeros Airport (the new superhighway at one end and the railway at the other) place a definite limit upon the length to which the main runway can be extended. Some fear has been expressed in the past that the runway is considerably too short for modern aircraft, such as the Douglas DC-6 which is operating through Rancho Boyeros on several services. It is reported that these aircraft, in order to maintain the necessary safety factor, cannot enter or leave the field fully loaded.

The mention of the transfer of the commercial airlines from the Campo Columbia military airport refers to a Presidential Decree, No. 3, of January 4, 1952, published in the Gaceta Oficial of January 28, 1952, which announced the revocation of the authorization for the two Cuban commercial airlines, Aerovias "Q" and Compañia Cuba Aeropostal, S.A., to use the Campo Columbia field. Permission to use the field originally was granted through Decree 2878 of December 3, 1946 to the Compañia Aerovias "Q", S.A. Authorization for the Compañia Cuba Aeropostal, S.A. was granted under this decree by Resolution 233 of April 8, 1949, of the Ministry of Defense. Under the new 1952 decree cancelling these authorizations the two Cuban lines are given a period of 10 months to remove

DGClark:eam

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their equipment, installations and other properties from the military airport to some other location. The Rancho Boyeros Airport is not specifically mentioned but in actual fact it is the only other airport available in the Habana area.

It will be recalled that the Cuban Federation of Air Workers has for some months agitated for the transfer of these two Cuban commercial lines from the military airport to Rancho Boyeros where all employees are unionized (see Embassy despatch 1267, February 1, 1952). It is rumored that the promulgation of Decree 3 expelling the commercial lines from the military airport was in compliance with the demands of labor. So far as is known, neither of these two Cuban companies has made any move to comply with the requirements of Decree 3; their services at the military airport continue and their installations are still in good working order. It would appear that these two companies undoubtedly are reluctant to make the required move and will probably postpone any definite action until the very last minute.

It is believed unlikely that Decree 3 will be strictly enforced especially in view of the recent change in government. A transfer of Aerovias "Q" from the military airport would probably force it into bankruptcy as it has an installation valued at approximately \$100,000 which would, of course, be a total loss if this move was made.

For the Ambassador:


DuWayne G. Clark
Counselor of Embassy

Enclosure: *att*

✓ Copy of news release published
in Havana Post.

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Havana Post, March 25, 1952

RANCHO BOYEROS AIRPORT VASTLY IMPROVED BY PAA

Havana now has a vastly improved airport with completion of Pan American World Airway's extensive construction program at Rancho Boyeros.

The project, designed to facilitate and speed up air travel to and from the Cuban capital, coincides with the completion of a new four-lane superhighway linking the airport with downtown Havana. The highway ends the former traffic congestion and cuts the driving time in half. Buses and automobiles can now go from Rancho Boyeros to the capital's business district in 15 minutes - far less than the average airport-city trip throughout the world.

At the air terminal itself, enlarged public health and immigration facilities speed up handling of passengers and their baggage, while a new cargo terminal doubles the present air cargo space.

Pan American is spending more than \$200,000 on the terminal improvements and another \$103,000 on general improvements to the airport as a whole.

The latter project embraces repairing and repaving taxiways and parking aprons, including the No. 1 taxiway from the terminal to the north end of the main runway.

The main runway, 4,800 feet long and 100 feet wide, has been entirely resurfaced with an inch and a half of asphalt.

The enlarged and renovated Rancho Boyeros provides Havana with vastly improved passenger and cargo facilities, and the terminal is ample to accommodate airlines now using Campo Columbia military airport, which the government is closing to commercial aviation.

Rancho Boyeros Airport, with completion of the program, represents an investment of more than two million dollars by Pan American.

Pan American's primary interest is flying airplanes, not operating airports. When it does the latter, as at Rancho Boyeros, it is through necessity, not choice. If a government agency is willing and able to take over, PAA welcomes the opportunity to step out of the airport picture.

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