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(Security Classification)

FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATOR

FROM

AMEMBASSY, HABANA

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. (3 Bricks.)

August 14, 1952

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SUBJECT:

Proposed Transfer of Airport From Rancho Boyeros to San Antonio de los Baños.

The controversy over the future location of Habana's international airport continues to attract a great deal of attention in Cuba; practically every newspaper published in Habana carries daily articles either for or against the proposed move to San Antonio de los Baños. The August 13 issue of Habana's influential EL MUNDO, for example, contains three fairly long articles about the airport move; it is also discussed in the lead editorial of the day and by one of the paper's popular commentators, Rufo LOPEZ Fresquet.

The Minister of Communications and Transport, who first suggested that the airport be transferred from Rancho Boyeros to San Antonio has announced that the government's decision on this matter is final and that San Antonio will be in operation in about six or seven months or as soon as an express highway can be built from Rancho Boyeros to San Antonio.

The Government's plans for a new airport are supported by ten airlines -- two Cuban and eight foreign -- that operate in Cuba. Last week, representatives of these companies sent a telegram to President Batista expressing their approval of the proposed move. The text of the telegram, which was signed by Aerovias "Q," Cuba Aeropostal, Chicago & Southern Airlines, National Airlines, KLM, — Braniff Airways, Aerolineas Argentinas, Linea Aeropostal Venezolana — (LAV), Lineas Aereas Españolas (Iberia) and British Overseas Airways (BOAC), is quoted below:

"Representatives of the ten Cuban and foreign aviation companies which support the transfer of international aerial operations to the Batista Airport at San Antonio de los Baños request of you that you grant them an audience so they may have the honor of explaining to you personally the powerful reasons of national and public interest which have inspired our decision in favor of the logical plan to that end submitted by the Honorable Minister of Communications, Dr. Pablo Carrera Justiz, who has interpreted correctly the most pressing needs of Cuban commercial aviation."

RLHarrell/ecv

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The proposed transfer is opposed by Pan American Airways, which owns Rancho Boyeros airport, and by its subsidiaries, Compañia Cubana de Aviacion and Compañia Mexicana de Aviacion. Compañia Cubana which operates Rancho Boyeros for PAA, derives considerable revenue from this source which of course it would lose if San Antonio becomes the international airport for Habana. Some doubt has been expressed whether Cubana could continue in operation without the revenue it earns from the operation of the airport at Rancho Boyeros.

Pan American's views are supported by the National Federation of Airline Workers and by a large number of Cubans who reside in or near Rancho Boyeros.

The position of Pan American Airways on the proposed move was summarized last week in Edward SCOTT's column in the HAVANA POST; a copy of this article is attached.

Both sides in this controversy have produced famous aviators to support their views. Juan SALAS, Cuban aviation pioneer is reported to have stated that he considered the "transfer of the airport to San Antonio de los Baños indispensable." Another famous flyer, Capt. TORRES De Navarra, declared that moving the airport to San Antonio would "deal a death blow to Cuban civil aviation."

Further views on the proposed move are contained in the attached copy of an article which appeared in the August 12 issue of the HAVANA HERALD. There are also enclosed five clippings on this subject from the HAVANA POST of August 12.

In view of the government's repeated declarations that San Antonio will soon be designated as the official international airport for Habana, the Embassy is of the opinion that this move will be carried out despite the opposition of Pan American Airways and the labor unions.

For the Ambassador:

d L. Harrell

Enclosures:

1. Edward Scott's column from HAVANA POST.

2. Copy of article from HAVANA HERALD of August 12.

3. Five clippings from HAVANA POST of August 12.

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Article from the HAVANA POST, Aug. 7, 1952

Other Side of the Medal

The disturbance at the corner of 23rd and "O" Streets Tuesday afternoon, had a very simple and innocent explanation. Several of us had run Roger Wolin to earth and two spearbearers were twisting his arm in order to induce him to present the case for Pan American Airways on the much-debated question of moving Havana's international airport from Rancho Boyeros to the former military field at San Antonio de los Baños.

S. Roger Wolin, as you know, is manager of Pan American's public relations department for Latin America, with headquarters in Miami. Since Panair owns Rancho Boyeros, I figured Roger was the man to give me his company's view on the plan to transfer all commercial airline activities to San Antonic. It was a most disappointing contact, however, because in half-an-hour on the air, I'll bet Roger didn't utter more than 8,954 words.

Having been 17 years with Pan American in almost every country in Latin America, Roger is beginning to know his way around the system and it is to be presumed that he has at least a passing knowledge of company policy and point of view. In this report, it's going to be a little difficult to separate what he said from my own contribution to the discussion, because I simply refused to keep my mouth shut and frequently we were addressing the multitude simultaneously.

In general terms, I think the attitude of Pan American World Airways is that the public interest would be better served by retaining Rancho Boyeros as the international airport of entry. Pan American owns the Rancho Boyeros field, but it has no aspiration—nor did it ever cherish any desire—to be a landlord. Pan American has been flying around this Hemisphere for a quarter of a century and in the old days it was a question of building or acquiring one's own airport or of not being able to include certain cities in the itinerary.

Admittedly the runway at Rancho Boyeros is too short for big, modern aircraft, and completely out of the question for use by four-engine jets like the British "Comet," which is the super-plane many lines will be using in the relatively near future. Pan American thinks that the Cuban Government might consider acquiring Rancho Boyeros by purchase, "on practically any terms which the administration might regard as reasonable." The runway could then be lengthened to 7,000 feet and other adjustments could be made at

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a cost estimated by an International Civil Aviation Organization report as being between \$800,000 to \$900,000. This same report says that the field then would be adequate for modern airplanes.

Pan American's declared position is that it does not want to continue to be a landlord, as it is in the present circumstances at Rancho Boyeros. It purchased that field years ago because there was no other, and its spokesmen believe that the Cuban Government would advance the public interest by doing the same with respect to Rancho Boyeros as was done with the 36th Street Airport in Miami, also once owned by Pan American. A few years ago that field was purchased by Dade County, which last year made \$500,000 on the operation of the airport. After the field had been purchased by the County, Pan American put up its own terminal building and other lines have followed suit.

One of the major disadvantages in using San Antonio de los Baños as an international port of entry in place of Rancho Boyeros is that it apparently is proposed to continue to use the former field for military purposes, at least for instructing student pilots. The port of Havana has very heavy commercial traffic and it is believed that student flying would be a definite hazard to commercial operations. This does not refer exclusively to Cuba. Everywhere in the world it has been found difficult to combine military and commercial flying operations and this is especially true when the schooling of student pilots is involved.

The question of the increased distance, San Antonio being considerably farther from town than Rancho Boyeros, also is a factor cited by those who feel that the present international airport should be retained. There is talk of building a modern highway from Rancho Boyeros to the new field, but this could not be completed for many months. In the meantime, passengers would have to be taken over the present road, which is in bad condition. Tourist agents are complaining that the low-money-bracket visitor will baulk at the increased cost of transportation from the airport to town. All of this will further endanger the tourist situation in Cuba where costs are rapidly increasing while they are being lowered in all of the Caribbean countries competing with this Island for tourist dollars.

One other point which was developed in the discussion was that if and when jet planes are put on the run from Miami to Havana, it will take longer to come from the airport to town than it will to complete the voyage by air from the United States to Cuba--that is if the move is made to San Antonio. And that sounds verray, verray, sillay in any dialect.

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Page 1 of Encl. No. 2 Desp. No. 240 From Habana

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Article from the HAVANA HERALD, August 12, 1952

Airport Move Is Disputed By Airlines

The dispute over transferring Havana's international airport from Rancho Boyeros to San Antonio de los Baños grew in intensity yesterday as the two sides involved set forth arguments supporting their stands. The ten airlines favoring the move to San Antonio held a press conference at the Hotel Nacional and issued a statement to the press.

Pan American World Airways, which owns the Rancho Boyeros field, and its affiliate, the Compañia Cubana de Aviación, released a statement by a veteran airlines pilot advocating that Rancho Boyeros be retained as the international terminal.

The ten airlines said they advocated using San Antonio because "this well-located airport, with its three more than adequate runways already constructed, requires only the erection of a terminal building and the extension of the highway from Cacahual to San Antonio to make it available for unrestricted use by modern aircraft." The airlines pointed out that a double-lane highway from Havana to Cacahual (about 14 miles) has already been constructed, leaving only about seven miles to be completed.

The airlines added: "Under normal driving conditions on a double-lane highway a maximum driving time of 35 to 45 minutes will be required to make the trip." The airlines said a rate of \$1.25 for aerocar transportation has already been established for the trip from Havana to San Antonio.

The Pan American statement quoted Capt. Torres de Navarra, who has flown the Atlantic 200 times, has 19,000 hours of flying time to his credit, and at present is a member of the Consultative Council. Capt. De Navarra said moving the airport to San Antonio would "deal a death blow to Cuban civil aviation," since passengers would be unwilling to travel all the way to San Antonio merely to take plane rides to Varadero, Cienfuegos, Santa Clara and Key West.

The captain also declared that Ariguanabo Lake near San Antonio creates cloud conditions at times unfavorable to flying.

De Navarra pointed out that the growth of the military air establishment at San Antonio "represents a serious danger to aviation in general." He asserted that pilot trainees and parachutists would present a menace to civil planes. He added that in

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the event of war, it might be necessary again to make San Antonio a purely military base, with the necessary displacing of the civil airlines.

The ten airlines favoring moving to San Antonio are Aerovias "Q," S.A.; Aerolineas Argentinas; Braniff International Airways; British Overseas Airways Corp.; Chicago & Southern Air Lines; Cuba Aeropostal, S.A.; Iberia Lineas Aereas Españolas; KLM, Royal Dutch Aviation Co.; Linea Aeropostal Venezolana; and National Airlines.

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Airlines State Reasons In Favor of San Antonio

may be fully and accurately informed to this position, ten airlines, Aetinas, Braniff International Air- International Airport. ways, British Overseas Airways Chicago & Southern Air Corp., Lineas Aereas Españolas, KLM Cia. Real Holandesa de Aviacion, Linea Aeropostal Venezolana and National Airlines, yesterday issued following statement:

Approximately three months ago in a letter addressed to the President of the Republic, all of the airlines serving Havana petition-

In order to clarify the position ed the Cuban Government to proof the great majority of the airlines vide a domestic and international serving Havana, both Cuban and airport adequate for the safe and foreign, regarding the proposed unrestricted operation of modern transfer of the International Air-commercial types of transport airport from Rancho Boyeros to the craft, as it was realized that Ranairport at San Antonio de los Ba-cho Boyeros was and is entirely innos, and in order that the public adequate in every respect for present day commercial aviation. This petition did not suggest or propose rovias "Q", S. A., Aerolineas Argen- any specific location for Havana's

In response to this petition and, as a result of a study of the avail-Lines, Cuba Aeroposta, S.A., Iberia able sites, the Cuban Government designated the airport at San Antonio de los Baños as the location for the international airport for Havana. We are supporting this choice because this well located airport, with its three more than adequate runways already construct-

(Continued on Page 10)

ed, requires only the erection of a of coco rock base. In comparison, terminal building and the exten- the 4800' runway at Rancho Boyesion of the highway from Cacahual ros was built in part of a two inch to San antonio to make it avail- asphalt surface on a coco rock base. able for unrestricted use by mod-

ern aircraft. The airport at San Antonio de los Baños is located at an actual distance of 25.7 Kms. from the intersections of 23rd and L streets, Vedado. The recently constructed double lane highway to Cacahual covers 23.5 Kms. of this distance, leaving the measured distance of 12.2 Kms., Cacahual to San Antonio, to be built. Under normal driving on a double lane highway a maximum driving time of 35 to 45 minutes will be necessary to make the trip. The few minutes more that will be required to reach the San sufficient gasoline to insure the safe Antonio Airport will not necessarily mean our passengers will have to leave their homes any earlier when the better facilities and comfort of a well planned modern terminal building with adequate space for airline counters and government offices will considerably reduce the time required to go through the necessary check-in procedures. In the same way the efficiently planned facilities of a new terminal building will reduce the processing time required for arriving passengers considerably. Also, the plans of the Govlength from a point in Marianio, population centers along the high-near Oriental Park, so as to consect way as well as the general public, with the Rancho Boyeros thus far. When ready for operation, the

Recent inspections of the runways at San Antonio reveal that they are in excellent condition and are ready and suitable for use by the latest and heaviest types of modern aircraft. On several occasions recently various airlines have used the runways at San Antonio for long range flight operations. Among these airlines has been Cubana de Aviacion who has used this airport to re-fuel "Estrella de Cuba" range flights where the inadequacy of Rancho Boyeros made it impossible to take off from that airport with a full load of passengers and arrival of the plane and its passengers at its destination.

Since the immediate availabilideparting on flights, inasmuch as ty of the San Antonio airport for commercial operations requires only the construction of an adequate terminal building and the extension of the highway-from Cacahual to Sai. Antonio, it is obvious that the total expenditure needed to assure this availability would be considerably less than the cost of the almost complete reconstruction of and additions to the facilities at Rancho Boyeros, which would be required in order to achieve the adequacy remment for the transfer of com- which San Antonio would offer. merical aviation activities to the Also, the extension of the new highwhich San Antonio would offer. airport at San Antonio de los Ba- way from Cacahual to San Antonio nos includes the construction of a will benefit not only those who use highway approximately 4 Kms. in the airport but also the towns and

new international airport at San latered Nunez Pascual, public re-

ternational aviation. By taking advantage of the opportunities which would be afforded by the use of the San Antonio de los Baños airport, Cuba and its capital city, Havana, would be liberated from the restrictive bonds which inadequate and antiquated commercial aviation facilities have imposed upon its rightful development and economic progress.

A meeting was held by the airlines yesterday to discuss the proposed transfer of the international airport and an address was given by Dr. Jorge Cubas, legal adviser.

The following persons were present: Gustavo Alfonso, president of "Compañia Aeropostal"; Luis R. Alfonso, vice-president of "Cuba Aeropostal"; Col. Manuel Quevedo, president of "Aerovias Q"; Callons Kennard, special representative of National Air Lines; Andres Verhaguen, District Manager of KLM; Francisco Finlay, KLM Manager; J. Roncajolo, special representative of the "Linea Aeropostal Venezolana"; Bernardo Hogan, special representative of "Linea Aeropostal Venezolana"; Pedro Ruiz, special representative of "Aerolineas Argentinas"; Eric Dobb, special representative of "British Overseas Airways Corporation; Douglas Wood, spe-cial representative of Braniff International Airways; Angel Solano. representative of Braniff; Cliton G. Sweazea, General Manager in Cuba of Chicago and Southern; Juan M. Palli, Manager of Chiacgo and Southern Airlines; Eugenio Diaz. Manager of Chicago and Southern;

to San Antonio to make it available for unrestricted use by modern aircraft. 💢

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A rate of \$1.25 for aerocar transportation has already been established for transportation from Havana to the San Antonio airport. A study of statistics reveals that 90% of airline passengers utilize the aerocar service or private transportation when traveling to and from airport.

When the airport at San Antonio de los Baños was constructed by the United States Government at a cost of approximately twenty million dollars, the engineers selected this location as the most favorable with respect to geographical and weather aspects in order that the field could be operated as a heavy bomber base on a twenty- Antonio will allow the airlines to tour hour-a-day wartime basis. Three runways varying from 7270 to 7000' in length, all of which are senger capacity which would auto-150' wide, were built together with adequate taxi strips and parking sonnel. aprons. The runways consists of an eight inch concrete surface on a by the military in conjunction, w strips are composed of a five inch dinated, does not constitute a day

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Since the immediate availability of the San Antonio airport for commercial operations requires only the construction of an adequate terminal building and the extension of the highway from Cacabual to Sai. Antonio, it is obvious that the total availability would be considerably less than the cost of the almost, complete reconstruction of and additions to the facilities at Rancho Boyeros, which would be required in order to achieve the adequacy which San Antonio would offer. Also, the extension of the new highway from Cacahual to San Antonio will benefit not only those who use the airport but also the towns and population centers along the highway as well as the general public.

When ready for operation the new International airport at Ban Antonio de los Baños should be operated by a non-profit, private Terminal Corporation with the airlines being fully represented in the directorate of the corporation. Aeronautical radio communication facilities at San Antonio should be provided by the existing non-profit communications company, Radio Aeronautica de Cuba, S.A. (RACSA), whose equipment and personnel should be transferred from the Rancho Boyeros airport.

The transfer of all domestic and international air service to San Antonio will not cause a reduction in the total number of employees of the aviation companies. On the contrary, the vastly improved facilities which will be available at San use, without restriction, faster and larger aircraft with greater pasmatically additional operating per-

To use of a portion of an airport hard coco rock base and the taxi civil aviation, when properly coorlayer of concrete on the same type ger to public safety. This has been and is being proven at numerous airports throughout the world. Examples of this joint and safe use are the airports at Miami, Berlin, St. Louis, Amsterdam, Memphis, Newark, Houston, Tokyo, and many others.

Cuba, by its natural position at the crossroads of the western hemisphere, should be the leading country in Latin America in in-

San Antonio de los Baños airport, Cuba and its capital city, Havana, would be liberated from the restrictive bonds which inadequate and antiquated commercial aviation facilities have imposed upon its rightful development and economic pro-

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AIRPORT CHANGE CRITICIZED

No airports should be suppressed under the present uncertain international conditions, but rather every effort should be made to establish new ones, Capt. Carlos Torres de Navarra, well_known Cuban aviator, opined yesterday, in connection with government plans to transfer the international airport from Rancho Boyeros to San Antonio de los Baños and the rumored intention of abandonment and building-up of the Rancho Boyeros field.

He suggested that the government purchase the Rancho Boyeros airfield and expand it, increasing the length of the runway and perhaps building another, for which purposes he claimed there was plenty of space.

Regarding the suggestion that the international airport be transferred to San Antonio, Capt. Torres expressed the opinion that it would be detrimental to Cuban aviation due to the great distance of that airfield from Havana.

He also cited the difficulties which would arise out of joint civil and military use of the field, pointing out that military operations would endanger civil aviation. He warned that the U.S. military authorities might have to take over the San Antonio field in case of threat of war, which would force the Cuban government to forbid its use by the civil aviation companles.

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Angust 12, 1952 Rec'd:

8:07 p.m.

99. August 12, 5 p.m

Secretary of State

Recommend United States does not (rpt not) become involved in bitter dispute between Transport Min supported by ten airlines and PAA regarding location airport. Believe Min wld strongly resent any opposition his announced irrevocable decision move airport to San Antonio.

Emb perceives no (rpt no) objection CAA technician confining his advice design terminal installations. Balance info requested DEPTEL 75 August 11, not (rpt not) available today account govt holiday.

AB: RVW

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TELEGRAPH~BRANCH

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FROM: Habana

Info

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CIA

Secretary of State TO:

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104, August 13, 3 p.m NO:

Emb rep interviewed Transport Min re DEFTE August 11 who stated he was unaware Cuban Emb had requested services CAA technician to advise on airport problem. Min declared govt decision to estab San Antonio as internatl airport is final and Pres Batista has already selected local architect to design terminal installations. Min indicated that request by Cuban Emb for technical assistance probably inspired by PAA and he wld check with Min State.

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August 13, 1952

5:25 p.m.

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In view info contained EMBDES 206 Aug 7, and TELS 99 Aug 12 and

164 Aug 13, DEPT and CAA deferring any action CUBAN EMB's request

airport engineer. CUBAN EMB has been so advised.

BRUCE

(Offices Only)

AUG 11 1002 P. M.

Drafted by:

8/14/52 ARA: AR: GM

Telegraphic transmission and

classification approved by:

E.G. Cale

Clearances

MID - Mr. Topping

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