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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

FROM: AMEMBASSY, HABANA

24
DESP. NO.

TO: THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON. - 1 Enc. July 6, 1953

REF: Despatch 2057, June 29, 1953

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUREAU OF
INTER-AMERICAN AFFAIRS
1953

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SUBJECT: Transmitting Naval Attaché Report on Incident at Cuban Navy Headquarters June 27.

The Embassy despatch under reference reported recent unusual activity at the Cuban Naval headquarters that gave rise to rumors that an attempt had been made by persons unknown to seize the Navy Headquarters Building. In this connection there is enclosed a copy of the Naval Attaché's report 13-S-53 dated July 2, 1953 containing additional information regarding the incident. It would appear that the incident consisted of an unusually realistic alert that came near to getting out of hand.

For the Ambassador:

Earl T. Crain
Acting Counselor of Embassy

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Enclosure:
Naval Attaché's report 13-S-53

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13-S-53

July 1953

U. S. NAVAL ATTACHE AND NAVAL
ATTACHE FOR AIR, HAVANA, CUBA

Confidential B-3
IFI # 0209.0108

CUBA: Incident at Cuban Navy Headquarters

BRIEF: Revolution scares in Havana

Ref: (a) NA Havana 9-S-53
(b) NA Havana 11-S-53

1. At 1158, Saturday, 27 June 1953, an incident occurred at Cuban Navy Headquarters which received publicity in several newspapers and which added to the numerous revolution rumors. The Embassy has already made a report of the incident. The affair started with several bursts of machine gun fire from the roof of Navy Headquarters, where guards are continuously on duty. Thereupon, there was considerable confusion in the building. Men were at noon mess, and immediately upon hearing shots and shouts, they formed a mob, heading toward their berthing quarters, grabbing their rifles and pistols and loading them. On the ladder from the mess hall to the berthing quarters, the traffic was so heavy that the scene resembled a mob attempting to leave a building on fire. Several men had minor wounds from falls and trampling, until the word was finally given for everyone to return to their normal pursuits. It is estimated that the confusion lasted for about 20 minutes.

2. A usual Cuban Navy source stated that the above affair was a drill alert for the benefit of the new Commodore, Rodriguez Hernandez. Another source, who was in the building, stated that alerts have been held before but sufficient officers had been alerted to avoid confusion such as this occasion, and although the official story is that this was just a drill, there is some doubt as to whether or not it was thought to be a drill or the "real thing". Newspapers have stated that it was a drill; another source (newspaper reporter) states that newspapers were asked to say as little as possible about the incident. One source stated that the "problem" on Saturday, announced to the guards, was that "Prio is marching from the Punta in this direction with a gang of sailors".

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NA HAVANA R12-S-53 OF 2 JULY 1953
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3. The Army Attaché gave a party mainly for benefit of Cuban Army Officers on 26 June, and the Air Attachés gave one for Army Air Officers on 27 June. Attendance was below normal at both affairs. There is some evidence to indicate that Campo Columbia Military Reservation was in an alert status.

4. Newspapers have stated that there has been no shake-up in personnel at Navy Headquarters recently. References (a) and (b) reported changes at Navy Headquarters.

NAVAL ATTACHE COMMENT: I believe that the Navy is maintaining an unusually strong guard against revolution, and that many military personnel are becoming "trigger happy". Even the barbers are armed with pistols; officers check readiness of pistols when going from one office in the building to another office. The NA has attempted to consult with the Cuban Navy Chief of Staff on numerous occasions on minor questions during the past several months. He has either been "in conference with the President" or "out on a business trip for the President" - never available.

Prepared and Forwarded:

W. M. RAKOW
Captain, U. S. Navy

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