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Explosion Shakes Cuba Ship

By HANS GROTKE

An explosion near the bow of a Cuban freighter in Montreal harbor early yesterday has raised speculation that anti-Castro forces have expanded their operations into Canada.

The blast occurred shortly after 3 a.m. There were no injuries reported and the vessel, the Maria Teresa, did not appear to have sustained any damage at her berth at Shed 10. However, a team of divers was scheduled to be sent down today to ascertain if the hull of the ship or the concrete pier were damaged underwater.

There were strong indications the explosion was the result of a bomb.

A few hours after the incident here, a group of anti-Castro Cuban exiles in New York claimed responsibility for the incident.

Claims Commandos Boarded Ship

The exile organization, called the Cuban Nationalist Organization, said the blast was caused by a bomb "planted by units of the Nationalist underwater demolition team."

It further claimed that some of its "commandos" boarded the ship and captured "important and confidential records." Police here, however, have denied any knowledge of this "commando" action.

In its New York statement, the nationalist association said the "attack" on the Maria Teresa was made by its demolition team "in close co-ordination with the sabotage section."

The statement called the attack the start of an "offensive war with which our movement, on all fronts, will fulfill its promise of carrying the Cuban war not only to our fatherland but to wherever it is necessary for the accomplishment of our liberation."

Insp. Ralph Carriere of the RCMP, claiming the cause of the explosion had not yet been determined, did not rule out the possibility a bomb was used.

'Bomb' Falls Short Of Objective

He said the RCMP received an anonymous phone call some time ago claiming a Cuban ship would be damaged in Montreal. As a result, he said, the RCMP reinforced their land harbor patrol and had two men on duty at the time of the blast. The vessel's skipper, Capt. Maximino Chacon, did not have any complaint about the RCMP protection, he said.

If a bomb was used in the incident, it fell short of its mark and landed in the water a few feet ahead of the vessel's bow. The subsequent explosion sent a shower of water high enough to flood the concrete pier, some 30 feet above the ship's waterline.

The explosion was heard at the foot of McGill Street and at Harbor Police headquarters, about one quarter of a mile distant. The only apparent damage caused by the blast was a few broken windows in Shed 10.

The Maria Teresa's 29-man crew was reported asleep when the incident occurred.