

(22)

## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

## Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: November 5, 1958

SUBJECT: INVESTIGATION OF CUBANA CRASH AND OTHER MATTERS.

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Smith - Habana  
Mr. Leonhardy - CMA

## COPIES TO:

ARA - Mr. Rubottom, Mr. Snow (2 cc)

CMA - Mr. Wieland, Mr. Little

INR - (2)

CMA/C - (1)

CMA - Mr. Leonhardy (lcc)

CMA - (1)

L/ARA - Mr. Neidle Amembassy - Habana Amconsulate -

Santiago de Cuba

NOV 12 1958

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937.723/11-558

In response to the Department's communication of yesterday on this subject Ambassador Smith made the following points in connection with questions raised: (1) there was no definite information as to who commandeered the Viscount aircraft but presumably they were of the "26 of July Movement". Also, there is a possibility they belonged to ex-President Prió. (2) With respect to the involvement in the jacking of American citizen passengers, the Ambassador said the Embassy had no information on this and thought caution should be exercised on this point. He said Mr. Martinez was being brought to Habana today and would be questioned. (3) The hijackers apparently were trying to force the plane to land in a rebel-controlled strip but it probably could not be found in the dark and their forced landing at Preston was their only salvation. (4) Only one uniformed body has been recovered and the Embassy has no knowledge of the type of uniform he wore.

The Ambassador said the Embassy's investigation of the crash was handicapped by the lack of an Air Attaché plane as the Air Force Mission plane was in Key West and the Navy Mission plane was in Jacksonville, both will be gone for two or three days. The Ambassador is trying to get one of the officers back today with Mr. Martinez.

Mr. Leonhardy told the Ambassador the Department had received his communication requesting the assignment of a small aircraft to the Air Attaché and that we had passed the request to the Defense Department and were working through some new channels to try to get a light aircraft assigned to the Air Attaché. He said he could not promise immediate action but that we were hopeful that something could be done, at least on a temporary basis in the near future.

The GOC

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(P8)

no cc's and Rm/R

The GOC, according to the Ambassador, is conducting an investigation and is requesting that we also conduct one. Mr. Leonhardy pointed out that as the aircraft belonged to a Cuban airline and the crash occurred in Cuba most of the factual information on which our authorities could base an investigation would have to come from the GOC. He added that we would inform the U.S. press today to this effect if queried on this subject.

With respect to efforts being made to salvage the plane and remove the remaining bodies, the Ambassador said the Cuban airlines has requested hoisting equipment be sent from our Guantanamo Naval Base to lift the plane from the bottom of the harbor where it is embedded in mud. He said Guantanamo indicated that it would be sometime before such equipment could be made available at the scene of the accident; that instead it was now acquiescing to the airline's request for divers to assist in recovering the bodies. The Ambassador understood that divers would be despatched to the scene by Guantanamo soon.

## INCOMING TELEGRAM

## Department of State

ACTION COPY

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53-51

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Action

ARA

Info

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SCA

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ARMY

NAVY

AIR

FROM: Habana

TO: Secretary of State

NO: 475, November 6, 6 p.m.

Classification 1958

Control

Rec'd: November 6, 1958

6:53 p.m.

ACTION:

INFO:

RM/R FILES

## PRIORITY

Following are excerpts from testimony of Osiris Martinez, survivor of Cubana airliner crash. Testimony brought here by Vice Consul Wayne Smith:

- (1) Several men, perhaps five, pulled guns and commandeered plane approximately 20 minutes after take-off.
- (2) Produced machine guns, uniforms and 26th July armbands.
- (3) Changed into dark green uniforms.
- (4) Passengers informed plane had been ordered to Mayari Arriba where a landing strip was ready to receive them.
- (5) Were trying to deliver an important package, after which plane would be refueled and pilot would be allowed take passengers to original destination.
- (6) Intimated pilot was not cooperating and gunmen might be forced to kill pilot.
- (7) Plane circled some field several times and believes a landing was attempted.
- (8) Over heard men say they would try to land in Prestes. After approximately 10 minutes level flight, plane circled again. After circling some time plane crashed.

Consul Smith personally saw the 26th July arm-bands. I do not believe there is any doubt that hijacking of Cubana

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-2- 475, November 6, 6 p.m., from Habana  
airliner was done by 26th July movement.

Complete text of testimony follows.

SMITH

AAL:TJM/7

Note: Mr. Leonhardy (CMA) notified 11/6/8:30 p.m. EH

SECRET

11/10

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937.723/11-658

(22)

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversations

DATE: Nov. 6, 1958

SUBJECT: INVESTIGATION OF CUBANA CRASH AND OTHER MATTERS.

PARTICIPANTS: Ambassador Smith - Habana  
Mr. Leonhardy - CMA

COPIES TO: ARA - Mr. Rubottom - Mr. Snow (2 cc)  
CMA - Mr. Wieland, Mr. Little  
INR - (2)  
CMA/C - (1)  
CMA - Mr. Leonhardy (1 cc)  
SCA - (1)  
1/ARA - Mr. Naidle

NOV 12 1958  
29

de Cuba  
Amembassy, Habana Amconsulate, Santiago

ABOUT 11 a.m.

Ambassador Smith informed Mr. Leonhardy this morning that several men who were pulled out of the wreckage of the Cubana Viscount Airliner that crashed at Preston, were wearing "26 of July" arm bands. The Embassy Consular Officers present at the scene corroborated the GOC report to this effect.

Ambassador Smith said that Mr. Martinez had returned to Habana accompanied by Vice-Consul Smith and that the Embassy had a signed statement from him, the gist of which will be sent up by telegraphic communication to be followed by a more complete report.

According to Martinez, four or five men pulled guns on the pilot and crew after the plane was airborne. They were carrying both guns and machine guns and were wearing "26 of July" arm bands. They announced to the passengers that they were going to land at Mayari Arriba and that they had an important package aboard to deliver. They said after the plane was refueled it would be allowed to depart with the passengers. The aircraft could not land at Mayari Arriba (the Ambassador did not know why except that it was probably too dark) and headed for Preston. Martinez said the plane was not shot at, as was reported by Cuban rebel sources.

The Ambassador said a Cubana aircraft was missing today on flight from Manzanillo to Holguin. Mr. Leonhardy replied that the newspapers here were carrying the story and reported one American seaman aboard. The Ambassador said the Embassy's information indicated the number of Americans ranged from one to six and that the

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Embassy also had a story that General Cantillo's son was aboard.

The Ambassador said there had been a reaction by the GOC to our statement indicating that we did not know who had commandeered the Viscount plane which crashed at Preston. He wondered why we had not attributed it to the "26 of July Movement". Mr. Leonhardy replied that we had no information from the Embassy to that effect until last evening but proposed to get the story out today now that the Ambassador had indicated our Consular Officers had seen the arm bands on bodies removed from the wreckage.

AT 5:00 P.M.

Mr. Leonhardy called Ambassador Smith to state that Col. Kieffer, registered agent for the Cuban Government, was making a statement on the Cuban airplane crash which differed substantially from the information supplied by the Embassy. The Colonel indicated that all bodies have been recovered and that one American citizen, Ponce de Leon, was found to be in rebel uniform. In reply, the Ambassador said that four bodies were still missing and that the body of Ponce de Leon had not been recovered. Only two bodies have been recovered in uniform: that of Raúl Rolando Rodriguez y Villegas and Pedro Valdéz Orta. With respect to Col. Kieffer's statement that the plane was directed to Preston, the Ambassador said that it was to have gone to Mayarí Arriba and in fact, according to the story of Martinez, attempted a landing somewhere east of Preston but was unsuccessful. The Cuban airlines report that the plane had sufficient fuel to fly until about 8:45. The watch recovered from the pilot's body stopped at 9:13, the approximate time of the crash which indicates that the plane was definitely out of fuel.

may have  
The Ambassador emphasized that the Cuban Government report/differed from the facts obtained from Mr. Martinez in that the Government had interviewed the three survivors. He said that Mr. Martinez had been met by Mr. Braddock at the Airport the night before; that Francis McCarthy of UPI was there but did not press Martinez with questions because of his condition. Martinez has several broken bones, is suffering from shock, and presently is in the Anglo-American hospital. Mr. Leonhardy said that we were concerned about the safety of Martinez and suggested that the Ambassador request the Cuban Government provide him protection. The Ambassador agreed this was a good idea and said he would do so immediately.

The Ambassador called about a half hour later to say that the communication which had been forwarded earlier in the day was referred back to the Embassy for correction and would therefore be delayed in arriving in the Department. Mr. Leonhardy mentioned to the Ambassador again the question of the safety of Martinez and suggested that the Embassy should advise him to return to the U.S. for his own personal safety. The Ambassador said he did not know whether Mr. Martinez would or could acquiesce as he was still hospitalized.

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27 WILLIAM STREET  
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**ARA**

CABLES  
"MENMOUNT"

1958 DEC 3 PM 2 36

TELEPHONE  
DGBY 4-7100

December 1, 1958

ACTION:

INFO:

RM/R FILES

*Handwritten:*  
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30-12/17/58

Secretary of State  
Department of State  
Washington 25, D.C.

Aiico Policy: 01274  
Assured: Compania Cubana de Aviacion S.A.  
Accident: November 1, 1958 - Cuba  
Aircraft: Viscount CU-T-603  
Our File: 168,508

Dear Sir:

We represent American International Insurance Company owned by United States interests and its reinsurers, Underwriters at Lloyd's London, who provided hull and liability insurance on a Viscount aircraft of Cuban registration CU-T-603 operated by Compania Cubana de Aviacion S.A. which was involved in an accident while making an approach to the Preston Airport in the Oriente Province of Cuba.

We wish to get as much information as possible about the accident and the events leading up to it. The writer discussed the matter generally in Washington with Mr. Leonhardy and with Mr. J.E. Brown at the Embassy in Havana. Because of the state of unrest in Cuba it is difficult to obtain factual details. We understand that personnel from the Embassy in Havana obtained a written statement from passenger survivor Osiris Martinez and if a copy of this statement is available we would appreciate receiving one. Any additional information you can furnish would also be very much appreciated.

Very truly yours,

MENDES & MOUNT

By: *Matthew J. Corrigan*  
Matthew J. Corrigan

DEC 29 1958

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937.723/12-158

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937.723/12-158

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**MENDES & MOUNT**

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NEW YORK 5, N. Y.

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TELEPHONE  
DIGBY 4-7100

December 29, 1958

*Rec. 12-31-58*

Mr. William A. Wieland  
Director  
Office of Caribbean and Mexican Affairs  
Department of State  
Washington 25, D. C.

*937-223712-158*

AIICO Policy: 01274  
Assured: Compania Cubana de Aviacion S.A.  
Accident: November 1, 1958  
Aircraft: Viscount CU-T-603  
Our File: 168,508

*This Document must be Replied  
to the RM/R Central File*

Dear Mr. Wieland:

In reply to our letter of December 1, 1958 requesting information about an accident involving a Viscount aircraft of Compania Cubana de Aviacion, you advised on December 22, 1958 that the statement of Osiris Martinez, a surviving passenger, is part of the State Department's classified records. Since this is not available is there other material, such as copies of press releases issued by the Department, which you can provide? If so, please send us a copy of the available documents.

Very truly yours,

MENDES & MOUNT

By: *Matthew J. Corrigan*  
Matthew J. Corrigan

RM/R
Anal. <i>rb</i>
Rev. <i>VS</i>
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**JAN 30 1959**

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SEP 29 PM 10:25  
October 16, 1959

ACTION: REA  
INFO: \_\_\_\_\_  
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## United States Senate

September 25, 1959

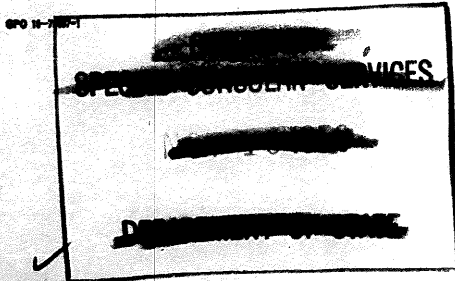
*ack - 10/5/59. ARA: REA: Dufussell:  
Shh  
Memo to H/A (through CMA) recommending  
action*

Respectfully referred to  
Hon. William Macomber, Jr.  
Assistant Secretary  
Department of State  
Washington 25, D. C.

for such consideration as the communication  
herewith submitted may warrant, and for a report  
thereon, in duplicate to accompany return of  
inclosure.

By direction of

ESTES KEFAUVER  
U. S. S.



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OCT 23 1959

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379968

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## Office Memorandum • UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT

TO : L/A - Mr. Warde M. Cameron

DATE: October 7, 1959

FROM : REA - Gerald W. Russell

SUBJECT: Request from Senator Kefauver for certain documents relating to the crash of the Cubana plane in Oriente Province of Cuba

Attached herewith is a letter to Senator Kefauver enclosing a copy of the statement by Mr. Osiris Martinez concerning the Cubana crash, which was requested by the attorney in this case. As this has been classified OFFICIAL USE ONLY this letter and the despatch will have to be forwarded to RM/R for the reproduction of an unclassified copy after this particular document has been declassified. The entire background file is also attached for your information.

I would have no objection to sending any other document contained therein which you feel should be forwarded with the exception of the statement by the United Fruit Company Representative. I do not believe that this should be furnished without prior clearance of the company itself because of the repercussions which might be felt by the company in Cuba.

## Enclosures:

1. To Senator Kefauver.
2. From Senator Kefauver  
September 25, 1959
3. Copy of "Testimony of  
Mr. Martinez"
4. Background file:  
Despatches 484, 486 and 488  
from Habana.  
Telegrams 441, 443, 449, 451,  
and 470 from Habana.

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Annul 31
Rev
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ARA:REA:GWR:Russell:DHH

CMA

ARA (Mr. Devine)

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OCT 12 1959 P.M.

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FW 937.723/9-2559  
CS/HHH

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I have no knowledge of any others  
C/R