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(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 - CMACOPIES 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. Neidle

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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.

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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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