

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of ^{Telephone} Conversation

DATE: November 7, 1958
4:30 p.m.

SUBJECT: Publicity on Cuban Plane Crash

PARTICIPANTS: Mr. Ben Meyer, Associated Press
ARA/P - Mr. Vaky

COPIES TO: ARA - Mr. Rubottom
ND - Mr. White
CMA - Mr. Little
Embassy Havana

I telephoned Ben Meyer and told him that I had been at the Secretary's press conference, heard his question, and was concerned that he may not have received all the information we have put out. In response to my query he said he had not seen the release that was put out late last night. I then read him the story. He said that if he had known this he would probably not have asked the question.

He then said that he did feel that he had reflected the feeling of the newsmen. Continued emphasis on lack of communication with Preston just did not make sense as an excuse for lack of information. He said that Preston was only a short distance from Havana. He pointed to the fact that we flew divers in on short notice, and that it was just hard to understand why we could not get such important information. This led him to suspect that we had the details but were trying to keep them quiet for some reason.

I pointed out to Ben that in trying to reconstruct what happened in an air crash there were only two sources of information -- recovery of bodies and wreckage and accounts of survivors. The recovery operation was still going on and necessarily took time. As to survivors I pointed out that two of them were in shock and apparently pretty confused. Martinez himself was in some shock for a while and had after all lost his whole family. It simply could not be expected that one could just get a full detailed deposition in an hour or so.

I also explained that the vice consuls went to Preston Monday morning. The plane which took them there returned almost immediately. One vice consul had returned to Havana by Thursday morning with the first full report which the Embassy

had

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

This Document must be maintained in the most Confidential form

937 723/11-7500

CS&J

937 723/11-7500

FILED
11-15-58

OFFICIAL USE ONLY

- 2 -

had received. That meant that we received the report within three days from the time the consular officials arrived at Preston. I suggested that this was after all pretty good time considering there were no cable or telephone communications with Havana.

I also pointed out that the vice consuls were after all not newspapermen and were not supposed to flash back news. They had to prepare a careful check-out report of what happened. As soon as the Embassy got the information it called us and we put it out as soon as we could. I observed that there had been, of course, several stories appearing in the press about bodies wearing uniforms and so forth, but that we did not want to put out anything which had not been carefully confirmed and checked since obviously the Department had to be careful in what it said.

Finally I assured him that we were not trying to conceal information, and that we were releasing data as we received it.

Ben said that this explanation made more sense than anything he had heard to date. He had not thought of the survivors being in shock, for example. He said he had not wanted to put any blame on anyone, and he was very grateful for my having called and read him last night's ~~reply~~ story.

He then asked where Martinez was. I said he was in a hospital in Havana. He referred to Col. Kiefer's press release that all bodies had been recovered, four bodies were wearing armbands, and one of these was an American, Ponce de Leon. I said that our information did not confirm that. We understood four bodies had not yet been recovered, that only two of those recovered had armbands, and that as of yesterday noon we understood that Ponce de Leon's body was one of those still in the water.

He then again thanked me for the information and asked that we notify him if anything else develops.

ARA/P:Vfaky:tmb

11/7/58

RE/R
Anal <u>31</u>
Rev <u>QA</u>
Cat <u>QA</u>

OFFICIAL USE ONLY