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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

DATE: November 1, 1958

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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
 ENR - (2)
 CMA/C - (1)
 CMA - Mr. Leonhardy (lcc)
 CMA - (1)
 I/Am - Mr. Neidle Amembassy - Habana Amconsulate - Santiago de Cuba

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Santiago de Cuba

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 Prieto. (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 mentioned that Martinez was being brought to Habana today and would be questioned. (3) The Cubans apparently were trying to force the plane to land in a rebel-controlled area 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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PF

no cc's sent Rm/R

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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.

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