

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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2003

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DISPATCH NO. HUL-A-943

PBSUCCESS
RYBAT/SECRET
CLASSIFICATION

DATE 28 MAY 1954

TO PBSUCCESS, Headquarters

FROM LINCOLN

REF: SHERWOOD 091, 094
DIR 01835

SUBJECT { GENERAL Operational
SPECIFIC Courier Service
(Incident involving Cuban Customs 21 May 54)

1. On 23 May 1954, Mr. [] was debriefed with regard to the incident surrounding the opening of the SHERWOOD tapes by the Cuban Customs on 21 May 1954.

2. [] stated that he had departed Miami, Florida, at 7:40 a.m. on 21 May 1954 on PAA Flight 443 enroute to El Salvador via Havana, Cuba. Upon arrival in Havana at approximately 8:45 a.m., all passengers deplaned during the usual thirty minute layover. He deplaned with the other passengers and passed through one custom check-point into a small area and then through another check-point into a larger area. The other passengers then went on through this second room into the lunch fountain, leaving their bags in the second room. One of the customs men told [] to leave his bags and go on with the other passengers. [] told him he would just wait where he was as he desired nothing to eat or drink. The customs man told him to go on into the fountain area and started to take the bags to hold until his return. [] having been briefed to hold on to the bags, did so and walked to the other end of the room away from the customs official. This official evidently became suspicious, got three other customs officials and approached [] They demanded to know the contents of the bags, which were PAA passenger bags with zipper tops. [] told them they were recording tapes for a motion picture company making film in Central America. They insisted that the bags be opened for inspection. They opened one bag and unwrapped one package of tapes. They appeared disappointed that the package actually contained tape. One of the customs officials wet his finger, touched the tapes and then tasted it, evidently for the purpose of checking on narcotics. They did not bother to open the other bag or check the tapes carefully. They made no notes nor evidenced any interest in the tapes.

3. [] continued on Flight 443 to Salvador where he had about a three hour wait, but no difficulty with customs. He then boarded Flight [] which was over an hour late, and arrived at [] at approximately 4:15 p.m.

4. Upon arrival in [] it was raining and the Steward on the airplane told [] he could not deplane. Only persons stopping in [] could alight

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from the plane. [] brushed by the Steward with the remark that he wanted to stretch his legs. At the bottom of the steps there was a guard stationed who blocked [] way with an umbrella. [] attempted to pass the guard and there resulted a brief argument. At this time [] proceeded out on the field and gave [] note which stated that Castillo is waiting for you, please follow [] The guard desisted in his attempts to stop [] when [] nodded to the guard that it would be all right for [] to go into the airport. [] stated that he then met CASTILLO in a pickup truck just outside the airport and the PAA flight bags were switched.

5. Corrective action will be taken in the future to prevent the recurrence of such an incident. The courier will be instructed to be the last person to leave the plane at Havana and will leave his PAA flight bag under the seat reserved for him. This bag will be inconspicuously sealed to prevent easy opening and also for the purpose of detecting whether or not it has been tampered with during the courier's absence. The courier will then be sure to be among the first passengers to return to the plane. Arrangements are being made to have [] insure that the courier is called off the plane "to receive a personal message in the []"

[]
WILLIAM D. PLAYDON

Distribution:

✓ 3 - Wash
3 - Files

N.R.CONNIFF/hew []

25 May 1954