

Castro Starts Freeing American Prisoners; 2 Women Are First

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Donovan Hopeful Of Release of Rest, Estimated 33 Men

HOMESTEAD AF BASE, Fla., March 17 (UPI)—New

York attorney James B. Donovan today brought back the first two of about 35 American prisoners held in Cuba.

Donovan and the prisoners, both women, flew back from Havana on a special plane. He said one other prisoner will arrive soon and "I hope for the other American prisoners to be released gradually." The others included nine skindivers arrested on a Cuban beach last month.

The women are Martha

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Key Latin American official suggests U. S. give anti-Castro Cubans free hand to destroy oil deposits in a Cuban harbor.

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O'Neal of Orlando, Fla., and Atlanta, and Geraldine Shamma, a native of Boston and a former New York City resident.

Donovan said he was confident that within the next few weeks he could collect evidence to prove to Fidel Castro that the skindivers were not saboteurs but were shipwrecked.

About 35 Prisoners

He said "about 35" Americans, including the two women and the skindivers, were

prisoners of Castro. But he emphasized that the figure includes some Americans of Cuban parentage or birth.

"These are the only two American ladies who were held prisoner," he said.

Donovan said he visited 17 American prisoners on the Isle of Pines yesterday afternoon and talked to others in Havana this morning. He said he saw the skindivers at Castro's request.

Mrs. O'Neal told newsmen she was arrested in the summer of 1960 because Cuban authorities "claimed I had some kind of contacts in Miami." She said she was man-handled while being arrested and was given only token legal representation at her trial, but was treated "nicely" in prison although the food was only starches such as potatoes and beans.

She said the first thing she would do in America was "eat a hot dog."

Owned Home in Cuba

Mrs. Shamma told newsmen she owned a home in Cuba before her arrest but has no plans to try and get it back "because I wouldn't go back there for a million dollars."

She said she was arrested March of 1960 and charged with counter-revolutionary activities, but that officials would tell her only that "we don't like what you've been doing."

Mrs. O'Neal had been sentenced to nine years and Mrs.