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THE HEMISPHE

CUBA

Phantom Raiders

The Cuban exiles are quick to cheer any small foray in their lopsided fight against Fidel Castro. But last week there was one blazing action in the waters off Cuba for which no one wanted to claim responsibility. It involved the 1,600-ton Spanish freighter *Sierra Aranzazu*, some 40 miles northwest of Great Inagua Island in the Bahamas, bound for Havana with a cargo of garlic, cognac, chicken coops and plows.

As the *Sierra Aranzazu* approached Cuba in the late evening hours, two small, fast boats swooped down on the vessel and raked it with repeated machine-gun bursts at a range of 20 to 30 yards. The captain and two crewmen were mortally wounded. The rest of the crew abandoned ship, which was now on fire. Fourteen hours after the attack, the lifeboat carrying all 20 crew members, eight of them wounded, two dead and one soon to die, was spotted by a U.S. Coast Guard plane, and a Dutch freighter sped to their rescue, carrying them to Great Inagua.

In Havana, Castro angrily blamed the attack on Cuban exiles, "equipped, paid and directed by the CIA," in retaliation against Spain for trading with Cuba. The Spaniards were just as angry. The Spanish ambassador in Washington, the Marquis de Merry del Val, acidly wondered how such an incident "could happen in an area practically controlled by the U.S." And at week's end 1,000 Spaniards demonstrated noisily outside the U.S. embassy in Madrid, chanting: "Assassins. *Cuba sí, Yanquis no.*"

The State Department hastily assured Spain that there was no evidence that the attackers came from U.S. territory—though it was not certain where they did come from. The strongest and most active exile group is Manuel Artime's Revolutionary Recovery Movement, which blew up a sugar mill on Cuba's southern coast last May and shot up a Russian radar station in the same area two weeks ago. Artime, a leader in the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion, now operates out of Central America, is believed to have some dozen torpedo boats armed with 57-mm. recoilless rifles and other weapons. Two other exile possibilities: the smaller November 30 Organization, which says it shelled a Cuban freighter homeward-bound from Canada two weeks ago; and the *Comandos Mambises*, which claims to have attacked a Russian vessel in the Cuban port of Cabañas early this month.

Although all three vehemently deny it, chances are that one of the groups staged the attack on the *Sierra Aran-*

zazu, either as a warning to nations trading with Castro, or in a case of mistaken identity, thinking it was the Cuban freighter *Sierra Maestra*, which had sailed through the same area the week before.