

CUBA

Freedom Riders

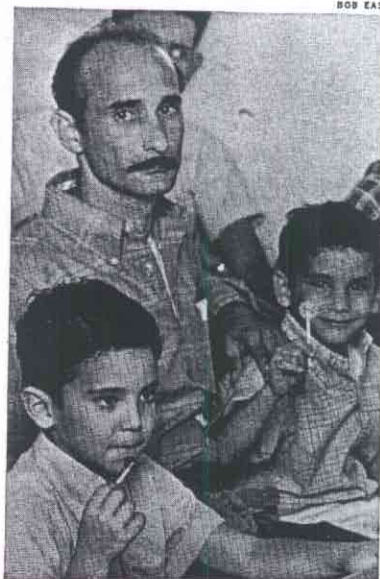
A determined group of Cubans intent on escaping the austerities of Fidel Castro's Cuba provided a bloody counterpoint last week to the nation's celebrations of the tenth anniversary of Fidel's reign. In the largest single escape attempt of the Castro years, 88 managed to fight their way past border guards and through the barbed wire surrounding the big U.S. naval base at Guantánamo Bay,* near the island's southern tip. Fifty or 60 others were

* Guantánamo, known as "Gitmo" to Navy men, was granted to the U.S. under a 1903 treaty signed after the Spanish-American War. The base covers 45 sq. mi., contains a supply depot and repair facilities, and is visited by about 130 Navy vessels a year.

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left behind, killed or captured by Cuban guards.

It was a well-planned attempt despite the losses. The organizer was a Havana trucker named Delgado, refugee sources said, who made regular trips between the capital and the southern area near Guantánamo. Delgado decided to use his huge trailer truck to crash through the barriers, and a list of passengers was drawn up. Last week Delgado set off from Havana on a regular run, but this time a number of men, women and children were concealed in the truck. More were picked up in Cienfuegos and Camagüey, and by the time the truck reached the city of Guantánamo, about 100 persons were aboard. Another 40 were waiting there. The driver set off toward the base, timing his ar-



CUBAN REFUGEES IN MIAMI
Taking off from a regular run.

rival at the boundary for 8 a.m., when the Cuban guards surrounding the base were to be changed.

At Guantánamo, he evidently took the wrong road and crashed head-on into a sentry hut. "Everyone piled out," one refugee recalled, "and began running for the fence about 200 yds. away. One of our men began shooting at the guards to hold them off, and they answered the fire while we were climbing over the barbed wire, shredding our hands. We threw the children over."

Why did they leave? In Miami, where most of the refugees were flown, one said: "We were superhungry." A mother said that she did not want her child "to grow up under Communism," and others complained of arduous working conditions. While it is true that the U.S. and Cuba reached an agreement in 1965 under which 132,421 Cubans so far have left for the U.S., the average Cuban applicant must put in one to two years as an unpaid agricultural laborer until his name comes up on the list. For some Cubans, that is too long.