

NIGHTMARE ISLAND

Hunger Main Reason for the Cuban Exodus

By ARTHUR GOLDEN

Communist Cuba today is a nightmare country haunted by the ghosts of reason and decency.

It is a place where swaggering militiamen lurk everywhere, where terror has tied the tongues of its citizens, where buildings are decaying behind stylish facades, where shabbily clad people have not eaten a decent meal in weeks.

The strutting militiamen are all sweetness and light when exiles arrive to pick up refugees bound for the United States.

HOT COFFEE

Altho it was after 3 a.m. when the exile crew of the Philip's IV and I reached Camarioca, the militia promptly served us piping hot coffee. Later, we were given hefty ham and cheese sandwiches.

"I hope your trip here was pleasant," said a smiling, non-commissioned officer. "Let us know if there is anything we can do for you."

His deep concern for our welfare was expressed in a military classroom decorated with stern portraits of Marx, Lenin and Castro's mentor in communism, bushy-bearded Camille Cienfuegos.

While food and drink is ladled out to visitors, the Cubans starve.

An old militiaman and his son who boarded the Philip's IV said they had not eaten in a week. Each was given a broiled chicken which they greedily wolfed down in minutes.

COMPLAIN

Empty bellies appear to be a principal reason for the exodus. In private conversations, refugees bitterly complained about severe rationing that limited each Cuban to three pounds of rice every 15 days and a quarter pound of meat a week. Rice, the staple of the Cuban diet is selling for \$20 a

NOTE: Arthur Golden of the staff of the New York World-Telegram and Sun, a Scripps-Howard newspaper, has just returned from Cuba where he covered the exodus of refugees. This is the story of what he saw and heard before he finally was expelled.

pound on the black market.

Once the militia's greeting cools, visitors to Camarioca find their every movement restricted. The hawk-eyed militiamen prohibited me from making any telephone calls or using telegraph or cable facilities.

At one point, I received permission to telephone New York City from a ship anchored in Camarioca. I was escorted to the ship by two militiamen.

'SHOWCASE'

My first night in the town was spent inside Camarioca's "showcase" refugee processing center. It is clean and attractively landscaped, with brightly painted wooden benches grouped in little plazas. About a dozen beachfront bungalows provide free lodging for exiles who have just arrived.

Refugees around the clock stream into the port's three-room administration building for final processing. Each clutches a bulging suitcase or a large shopping bag crammed with clothing, all they are permitted to take from the country.

The area is circled by a hurricane fence and patrolled by guards. Orders are barked

constantly over a loudspeaker in the best big brother tradition.

'THE OASIS'

Later I was driven in a rattling British-made bus to "The Oasis," a hotel that in pre-revolutionary days attracted the wealthy to its palm-shaded seaside grounds.

The palms remain but everything else has changed.

Telephones do not work. Air conditioners have been ripped from the walls. Plaster flakes from the ceilings. Cigaret butts litter the floors.

There is a more sinister change. Armed militiamen are stationed at each exit. They permit no one to leave unless ordered to do so.

I asked one guard what he would do if I shoved him aside and fled down the hotel's curbed driveway.

"I shoot you," he replied. He did not smile.