

Cubans and Exiles Blame Each Other For Attack on Ship

Paraphrase

From News Dispatches

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico, Sept. 16 — Fidel Castro's government and Cuban exiles are blaming each other for the machinegunning of the Spanish freighter Sierra Aranzazu.

Three crewmen were killed and seven injured when two unidentified speedboats attacked the 1600-ton ship Sunday night and set it afire off the eastern tip of Cuba.

(In Washington, Secretary of State Dean Rusk assured the Spanish Ambassador there was no evidence that the attack was launched from U.S. territory or waters. The State Department offered Spain "full cooperation" in investigating the incident.

(Spain's Ambassador to Washington, Marquess de Merny Del Val, denied a report from Madrid that Spain was holding the United States responsible for the incident. And the State Department said "any suggestion that the United States has any responsibility for this incident is wholly rejected.")

Earlier, the Cuban Armed Forces Ministry in Havana issued a statement charging that mercenaries "equipped, paid and directed by the (U.S.) Central Intelligence Agency" attacked the ship.

Two Cuban exile leaders—Manuel Artime and Manolo Ray—denied their men were involved.

Other exile sources had said earlier that Artime's organization made the attack.

In Nassau, capital of the Bahamas, there was speculation in government circles that Castro gunboats may have fired on the Spanish ship. These circles suggested that Castro might want to create an incident he could exploit politically.

An anonymous telephone caller in Miami, Fla., said it was a torpedo attack and was the work of a secret organization and added: "This is the beginning of attacks on any ship that trades with Cuba."

The claim didn't jibe however, with the reports from the surviving crewmen that the Spanish ship was attacked by machinegun and cannon fire.

The Aranzazu was bringing textiles, toys, cork and garlic from Spain to Havana.

The 17 survivors from the Sierra Aranzazu were flown to San Juan yesterday. They told newsmen the attacking boats fired three machinegun bursts.

"It was too dark to see the boats approach," said Santiago Ibanez. "They fired machineguns at us and the ship caught fire."

"The attack lasted 5 to 10 minutes. We abandoned ship immediately for fear of explosion. The two attacking boats approached us and remained nearby for awhile. The captain and two officers wounded by the machinegun fire died in the launch."