

Cubans Who Fled Tell of Desperation

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MIAMI, Jan. 9—"People are going mad in Cuba. They will do anything to get out."

The 13-year-old Cuban student who made this statement was one of the 88 men, women and children who succeeded in fighting past Cuban Army guards Monday in a desperate escape to the United States Guantánamo Naval Base.

A frail woman from Havana, who found the strength in her 95-pound body to get herself and two small sons over the six-foot wire fence around the base, watched her children play with plastic toy trucks at the Cuban refugee center here.

"I didn't want them to grow up under Communism," she said.

A wiry young man, who

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spent three years in the Cuban Army and was one of the leaders of the escape, said he was ready to go back and fight to overthrow Premier Fidel Castro if the United States gave support to insurgent Cubans.

Hopes Pinned on Nixon

"People in Cuba have their hopes pinned on Nixon," he said. "If there is a new invasion, this time it will be different. The whole island is ready to rebel."

President Kennedy gave United States training arms and limited support to a Cuban exile invasion in 1961 that was thwarted in 48 hours at the Bay of Pigs by Premier Castro's air force and militias. There was no internal uprising.

Hunger and forced labor were the two complaints most generally voiced by the refugees, who came from various parts of the island. They included both lower-middle-class students and laborers, in addition to entire working-class families. Their feat constituted the largest mass escape since the Castro regime began 10 years ago.

"Not only is there not enough to eat, but they make you spend extra hours in the fields after a 54-hour work week," said a Negro brick layer from Guantánamo, a city near the base.

The refugees, who arrived here from the Guantánamo base

yesterday in two United States Navy planes, were being processed for residence in the United States today along with the regular daily quota of 160 refugees who arrived here by airlift from Varadero Beach, Cuba, under the United States-Cuban agreement that permits some people to leave for the United States.

Processed With Others

This is the safe, but slow way out of Cuba for those who have a United States sponsor. Some arrivals today had already waited more than three years for an exit permit. The fugitives chose the dangerous, illegal way out. It cost some of them their lives and others, including 40 believed to have been captured, face the likelihood of years of imprisonment in Cuban labor camps.

An account of the escape was pieced together from the recollections of different participants, some of whom asked not to be identified because of relatives still in Cuba.

Truck Driver Began It

The plot began with a Havana truck driver named Delgado, whose job for the state transportation enterprise took him on frequent trips to the eastern Province of Oriente. In Guantánamo, a major sugar-producing region in Oriente, Mr. Delgado met a group of young men who were living in semi-clandestine fashion to escape military service or forced agricultural labor.

Over eight months the plotters met and discussed a plan to use the big trailer truck to get through the barbed wire enclosures and checkpoints manned by Cuba's Frontier Battalion around the 17.4-mile perimeter of the Guantánamo base.

A plan of the base was obtained and a weak point in the Cuban defenses chosen. The plotters tried unsuccessfully to acquire arms and ammunition.

The decision to make the attempt came during Christmas week, when some of the members of the Guantánamo group had been given leaves to visit their families.

Mr. Delgado and a nephew, Daniel, put about 20 members of their family and some friends from Havana into the truck and set off for Guantánamo 600 miles to the east. Along the route they picked up some others who were doing farm work.

The trailer, a big United States-built truck in which a Soviet diesel engine had been installed, arrived in Guantánamo about 1 A.M. Monday. Mr. Delgado parked near the head-

quarters of the Committee for the Defense of the Revolution. These watchdog committees often gather city people to be trucked to work in the countryside.

It attracted little attention, therefore, as the plotters entered.

Many of the fugitives were people who learned of the plan at the last minute and just jumped aboard.

When the trailer was jammed, Mr. Delgado closed the door. There were estimated to be 150 aboard.

Stopped by Road Patrol

From Guantánamo, they set out for Caimanera, the Cuban town closest to the United States base. It was 4 A.M. A road patrol stopped the truck, but Mr. Delgado said he was on his way to pick up a load of sugar and was allowed to pass.

Near the town cemetery, the six-foot Cuban barbed wire fences come within 300 yards of the road. The Guantánamo base fences are 300 yards beyond.

Mr. Delgado drove off the road and set across the field a cement pillbox on iron legs. The truck smashed over the pillbox.

From another pillbox, two Cuban soldiers armed with automatic rifles rushed out. Daniel Delgado, firing a .45-caliber pistol, the only weapon possessed by the group, killed the two sentries. The younger Delgado was said to be a marksman.

As the truck careened toward the Cuban wire fence, one wheel went into a ditch and the trailer jackknifed. The peo-

ple inside spilled out and headed for the fence. It was broad daylight.

An alarm had been sounded. Cuban soldiers opened fire as the fugitives fought their way through the barbed wire.

"I don't know how many were killed," one refugee said, "but I saw some people fall wounded, including women and children. If we had only had arms we would have wiped them out."

Among those surrounded was the wife of Daniel Delgado. He ran to get her and was shot.

"I saw him fall, but he kept on firing and got a couple of the soldiers," said a refugee. The exchange of gunfire allowed many to get across the fence and into the base.

Did Not Fire Back

The United States marines inside the base are not allowed to fire back at the Cubans without specific orders. These were not issued.

There is a fairly regular flow of Cubans into the Guantánamo base. Some arrive by land, and some swim past Cuban cutters. The monthly rate is believed to be about 100.

Oscar Torres Sanchez, a 19-year-old jockey in training at Hialeah Race Course here, made it to Guantánamo late in 1967 by swimming five hours.

Many arriving today were friends of Mr. Torres Sanchez. He was on hand to greet them and provide advice on housing, jobs, and the finding of relatives.

Among the refugees was a little girl about one and a half years old, who was pulled over the fence in the scramble. Her parents have not appeared.