

81 of 150 Shoot Way Past Cuban Lines, Reach Guantanamo and Fly to Florida

Rest of Band Is Killed or Seized—Survivors Are Accepted by U.S.

Special to The New York Times

MIAMI, Jan. 8 — A group of 81 Cubans shot their way past Cuban Army guards yesterday and entered the United States base at Guantánamo. They arrived in Miami today as refugees.

It was the largest number of Cubans ever to flee at one time since Fidel Castro came to power 10 years ago.

United States officials refused to discuss details of the break, but the Cubans arrived this morning at the Coast Guard's Opa-Locka Air Station aboard two Navy C-135 aircraft from Guantánamo.

According to informed sources, the refugees were part of a group of at least 150 men, women and children who gathered secretly near the Guantánamo Naval Base on the southern coast of Oriente, Cuba's easternmost province.

They were armed and when they approached the base somewhere on its 17.4-mile perimeter they were attacked by Cuban soldiers from the crack Frontier



The New York Times Jan. 9, 1969
The U.S. base at Guantánamo, shown in black on both maps

Battalion, which surrounds the Guantánamo base.

The sources said that at least 30 of the Cubans had been captured and 12 to 15 killed in the attempt to reach the wire enclosure around the base.

Those who made it to the base were taken in by the United States marines who guard the gates. The Cuban forces normally maintain a no man's land of 200 yards around the fence.

The group was kept under close military security here while processing went on at the Miami Cuban-Refugee Center, known as Freedom House,

near the Miami airport. Members of the group were being released as relatives or friends pledged to provide lodging for them in the United States.

Other recently arrived Cubans said that tight internal security conditions on the island, particularly in the vicinity of the base, made it extraordinary that such a large group could have formed and obtained enough arms to battle the guards.

The refugees were reported to include some who had come from as far away as Havana.

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The group was reported to consist of 46 men, 13 women and 22 children.

This was one of the most spectacular escapes from Cuba in a history of dramatic flights. Small boats and even inner tubes have been used to cross the 90 miles to the United States.

There is an airlift that brings refugees to the United States five times a week from Varadero Beach, Cuba, under an agreement between the United States and Cuba.

Under the agreement, the names of those whom the two Governments regard as eligible for the airlifts form the so-called Joint Consolidated Lists, from which Havana selects passengers for the Varadero-Miami flights.

Cuban males between 15 and 36 years of age, and sometimes technicians and specialists, are not permitted to leave.

When a Cuban applies, an inventory of all his possessions, including household articles and savings accounts, is taken by the authorities.

He cannot sell or give away any of the inventoried items, most of which he is obliged to turn over to the state. He is permitted to take with him only a few personal belongings, but no valuables.

More important, every able-bodied future refugee is sent to work in agriculture for a year. Those whose names are now approved may expect to wait two years before being able to leave.

This airlift, in operation more than three years, has brought over 131,000 Cubans to the United States. It is estimated that over 400,000 Cuban refugees live in the United States, half on the greater Miami area.

Steady Trickle to Base

In the 10 years of the Castro regime, there has been a steady trickle of refugees seeking refuge at Guantánamo although United States officials have never officially recognized these escapes.

The Guantánamo Base was granted to the United States through a 1903 treaty that provides that fugitives from Cuban justice must immediately be turned over to the Cuban authorities. It also requires that persons entering the base, except for Cuban employes who have work permits, must pass through Cuban immigration control.

The reluctance of United States officials to discuss the most recent break stemmed from the possibility that this incident would provoke even more friction with Cuba over the future of the base.

Premier Castro's position has been that he would not challenge the treaty, but that in time Cuba would present her claims internationally for the recovery of Guantánamo.

Base Serves U.S. Fleet

Guantánamo is a 45-square-mile base that exists to serve the United States fleet. It contains ship-repair facilities and a naval supply depot. An average of 130 vessels a year, manned by 45,000 to 60,000 men, visit the base for up to

10-week periods of shakedown or refresher training.

Three years ago it was estimated that Premier Castro had spent \$6-million to \$15-million to make a no man's land and military zone out of a wide strip of terrain adjoining the base.

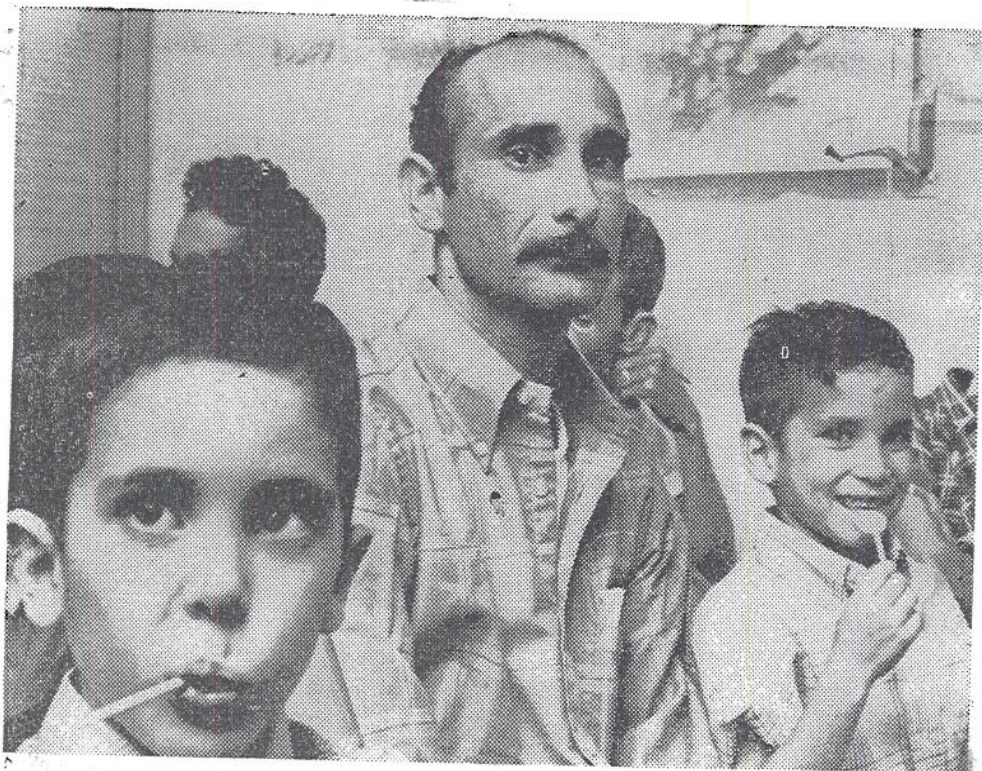
An elaborate but militarily erratic system of obstacles and fortifications was said to have been constructed around the fence separating the United States enclave from the rest of Cuba.

To the men stationed there, the base is known as Gitmo from its official abbreviation "GTMO," used in correspondence and communications.



Associated Press

Eight of the Cuban refugees who escaped to the Guantanamo naval base posing for photographers on their arrival yesterday at Freedom House in Miami. The refugees, mostly younger men, refused to talk to newsmen about escape.



United Press International

A father and his sons, part of the refugee group, wait to be processed at a Miami refugee center. They refused to give their names for fear of endangering relatives in Cuba.