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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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KOFORM S-E-C-R-E-T 24

COUNTRY	Cuba	REPORT NO.	CS-3/108,535
SUBJECT	Cuban Revolutionary Air Force (FAR), Information Concerning Strength, Equipment, and Loyalty of Personnel to Government of Fidel CASTRO Ruz	DATE DISTR.	14 August 1959
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DATE OF INFO.	July 1959		CS-3/108,636
PLACE & DATE ACQ.	Cuba, Habana (28-29 July 1959)	FIELD REPORT NO.	

SOURCE EVALUATIONS ARE DEFINITIVE APPRAISAL OF CONTENT IS TENTATIVE

SOURCE: Former member of the Cuban armed forces who is sympathetic to Pedro Luis DIAZ Lanz, former FAR chief (F). Appraisal of Content: 3.

1. There follows information on the Cuban Revolutionary Air Force (FAR), its strength, equipment, personnel, and training courses.
  - a. Leadership - Juan ALMEIDA Besque, who replaced Pedro Luis DIAZ Lanz as chief of the FAR, is not a pilot himself and he knows nothing about aircraft or about the administration of an air force. He has dismissed 19 officers from the FAR since he assumed command in June 1959, several of whom were among the best pilots in the FAR. He is a "yes-man" to Fidel CASTRO Ruz, Prime Minister of Cuba.
  - b. Personnel - There are approximately 14 pilots in the FAR at present, and only six or seven of them are competent. The majority of the mechanics are former BATISTA personnel, and most of the replacements and repairs on the aircraft are made by cannibalizing. At one time one of the top officers of the FAR established a preparatory school in Baracao, in Habana Province, for persons who wanted to take the examinations for flight training. In March 1959 there were 350 students enrolled in this school, 150 of whom were illiterate. Fidel CASTRO told the commanding officer that there was no need for such examinations, that he did not want "fancy boys" in the FAR, but wanted instead pilots like the Japanese suicide pilots who would go where they were told.
  - c. Status of Aircraft - The FAR has the following aircraft:
    - 1). Five jet planes, only four of which are in flying condition. CASTRO is trying to get more jet planes from Venezuela.
    - 2). Twenty Furies, only six of which are in flying condition.
    - 3). Four DC-3s.
    - 4). Two C-47s.

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STATE	X	ARMY	X	NAVY	X	AIR EV	X	POST	2	SEC		USIA	X	OTHERS
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Note: Washington distribution indicated by "X"; Field distribution by "2"

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- 5.) Two C-46s, one of which is in very poor condition.
- 6.) Two DC-4s, one of which is being repaired.
- 7.) Seven Bell helicopters.
- 8.) B-26s, number unknown.
- d. Ammunition - The FAR has 1,500,000 rounds of 50-caliber ammunition, 15 to 25 five-hundred-pound bombs, and some rockets. All 50-caliber machine-guns have been removed from the FAR's P-47 planes and have been put on tripods for ground and air defense in areas where attacks are expected.
- e. Instructors - The FAR employs 11 Chilean instructors. They each receive \$750 a month as salary.<sup>1</sup>

2. With regard to commercial aircraft in Cuba, Cuba Aeropostal S.A. (Cuban Air Postal Aviation Company) has four C-54 planes. This company is under the direction of a Captain SIMBY (fnu).<sup>4</sup> SIMBY sends planes to Miami from Cuba every three or four days to smuggle arms back into Cuba. SIMBY is a suspected Communist. With regard to Compania Cubana de Avionacion (CUBANA Airlines), it lacks experienced pilots because Fidel CASTRO dismissed all of the experienced pilots. CUBANA now operates at a loss of \$400,000 a month.

3. Following the defection of Major Pedro Luis DIAZ Lanz on 30 June 1959 many FAR officers resigned or were dismissed from the FAR by ALMEIDA. Some of these men fled to Miami, some remained in Habana, and the whereabouts of others are not known. There are also several men who remained in the FAR, but who are believed to be loyal to DIAZ Lanz and who probably would support him if he attempted to overthrow CASTRO.<sup>3</sup> The names of some of these men and information on them, when available follows:

a. Those who fled to Miami.

- 1.) Major Jose Mario GOMEZ y Fernandez - Former Adjutant-General of the FAR, or third-in-command of the FAR.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.) Major Benigno DIAZ - Has had 19 years of experience in the Air Force and was considered the best pilot in the FAR. He was dismissed by ALMEIDA.
- 3.) Lt. Manuel CARRAS - Excellent pilot.
- 4.) Jose Marcos DIAZ Lanz - Brother of Pedro Luis DIAZ Lanz and former Inspector-General of the FAR.
- 5.) Captain Huber Knistek - Excellent pilot.

b. Those who remained in Habana but left FAR.

- 1.) Captain Nester ALTAREZ - Resigned from the FAR when DIAZ Lanz left on 30 June. He was the pilot who flew Fidel CASTRO back to Cuba from Bogota, Colombia, in 1953. At present he is in hiding in Habana.

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- 2.) Captain Rafael Higez - Former paymaster of the FAR. A former member of the 26 of July Movement, he resigned when Pedro DIAZ Lanz defected. He is in touch with Eloy GUTIERREZ Manoyo, of the Segundo Frente Nacional del Escambray (SFNZ, Second National Front of the Escambray).
  - 3.) Major Antonio TORRECILLA - Was considered the best pilot-navigator in the FAR. He was dismissed by ALMEIDA and now is in hiding in Habana.
- c. Those whose whereabouts are not known.
- 1.) Captain Blas BALBOA - Former member of the 26 of July Movement and qualified pilot, was dismissed by ALMEIDA. Probably is in Habana.
  - 2.) Captain GARCIA Iniguez (fn) - Former member of the 26 of July Movement and qualified pilot, was dismissed by ALMEIDA and probably is in Habana now.
  - 3.) Captain Juan VIVERO - Was assistant to Jose Marcos DIAZ Lanz and resigned when Pedro DIAZ Lanz left.

#### Headquarters Comments

1. On 8 March 1959 the Santiago, Chile, newspapers reported that the following former CINZA and AIA pilots had been contracted by the Cuban Government as FAR instructors: German ACEVEDO y Salas, Jaime ALBERTO SILVA, Carlos Riberelli Linoz, Hugo SURY RODRIGUEZ, Jacques LACAS Navarro, Juan ARELLANO Sanchez, Gerardo Paignegy Brugone, and Domingo MIRQUEZ Olivier. TDCS-3/102,325, dated 13 June 1959, reported that these eight men, as well as another Chilean by the name of Andres ALDREY Perez, one American, and two Venezuelan pilots were flying arms from Cuba to the Isle of Pines and from there directly to Nicaragua, using C-46 planes from Venezuela.
2. This may refer to Jose Alberto SEMEY y Esalgas, who was a pilot for the 26 of July Movement during the revolution. Cf. TDCS-3/102,659, TDCS-3/380,304, and TDCS-3/379,043 for further details on Jose Alberto SEMEY.
3. Cf. CS-3/108,636 for a report from the same source on other persons, not FAR officers, who probably would support DIAZ Lanz if he attempted to overthrow CASTRO.
4. Cf. TDCS-3/103,000, dated 19 June 1959, which reported that CEUZ had resigned as FAR Adjutant General. This was before DIAZ Lanz had defected, but while ALMEIDA was Acting Chief of the FAR.