

Donovan Finds Castro Talks Costly, Frustrating

NEW YORK (UPI) — James B. Donovan, the one-man freedom train for persons imprisoned in Cuba, has been losing two things recently—sleep and money.

The Brooklyn lawyer, who negotiated the release of the Bay of Pigs prisoners and more recently nine American skin divers, told in an interview today about the physical and mental strain of negotiating with Fidel Castro.

"They work at night down there," he said. "One night I got three hours sleep, another time two hours and a third night none at all. Once Castro phoned me at 2 o'clock in the morning and announced we were going fishing at 6 o'clock. We did, too."

So far as money is concerned, lawyers estimate Donovan has lost \$100,000 in legal fees because of his work in rescuing prisoners in Cuba. He is counsel for the Cuban Families Committee and serves without pay. Not that he is about to become a pauper because he is a member of a well-known firm that has 18 lawyers on its staff. But he has made substantial financial sacrifices ever since he was named by the Brooklyn Bar Association to defend the Soviet spy, Col. Rudolf Abel. Subsequently Donovan negotiated the exchange of Abel, who was taken out of federal prison, and traded for U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers. That led to the dozen trips he has made to Cuba and his work is not finished yet. There are still 22 Americans held by Castro and Donovan hopes to negotiate for them in about a month.

How does he establish contact with Castro and go about getting into Cuba?

Uses Intermediary
"Well," he said, "I'll tell you about one weekend. On Friday, March 15, I was in federal court here. When I want to go to Cuba, I make a phone call to Havana to a person who is a sort of intermediary down there. I had put in a call and Friday afternoon I got word that clearance had come through."

"I didn't make a reservation, but I went out to Idlewild Airport and got a seat on an Eastern Airlines jet for Miami. I always fly down there at night. At Miami I went to a hotel and registered under an assumed name. You have to be careful to choose a name that matches the initials on your baggage and I use Davis a lot of the time."

"I only carry one bag containing tropical clothing and a brief case. From the hotel I phoned a restricted area of the Miami Airport and got in touch with Pan-American which provides a small plane for the flight to Havana. I asked them to get clearance for me to fly across the Cuban anti-aircraft batteries. It came through pretty fast this time and we took off for Havana."

"Seven men well-armed and wearing black silk suits met me at Havana. I didn't have to show a visa or a passport or anything."

WON'T USE CAR

WASHINGTON (UPI)—Speaker John W. McCormack said today House Clerk Ralph R. Roberts has agreed not to use his government-provided limousine to go to nearby race tracks any more.

McCormack told newsmen Thursday that "Mr. Roberts will use the car strictly for official purposes."



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I guess my face is pretty well known by now. Three of the men got into a car with me and the other four into another car and we drove to one of the four houses maintained by the Cuban Ministry of External Affairs. Everything was ready for me there and I put in a call for Castro.

Some Long Delays
"Sometimes I get to see Castro right away and sometimes there is a delay of hours. I started talking with him on Saturday and continued through on Sunday, March 17."

"Saturday he took me for an automobile ride and we kept negotiating. He is always very courteous and correct and he gave me a good lunch of fruit cup, chicken soup, red snapper, salad and coffee. Also an excellent cigar."

"By Sunday I could sense that the negotiations weren't getting very far, so I decided to try the luck of the Irish. I said to Castro: 'Look, do you know what day this is?' This is Saint Patrick's Day and Saint Patrick is my patron saint. They are painting a green line down Fifth Avenue in New York and getting ready to have a parade."

"Do you know who one of the big heroes of South America is? Bernard O'Higgins is his name. It's bad luck to deny anything to an Irishman on Saint Patrick's Day, and what's more you have two American women in prison and one of them is named O'Neal."

Appealed To Castro
Somewhat to Donovan's surprise this Celtic appeal impressed Castro. He went away for a while and then returned and said he was releasing the two women, Geraldine Schamma and Martha O'Neal."

They came out of jail wearing their denim prison clothes and Donovan flew back to Miami with them on Sunday."

"Monday morning," Donovan said, "I was back in federal court and the judge looked at me sort of surprised and asked: 'Well, where have you been and what's new?'"

Donovan's successes in Cuba have caused rumors that he is in the pay of the Central Intelligence Agency and actually is working in behalf of the U.S. State Department in an attempt to negotiate some sort of diplomatic accommodation between Washington and Havana. Donovan says that if something plus in a diplomatic sense comes out of his work he will be glad, but he stoutly denied he was working for the CIA or the State Department.

"I have never even met Secretary of State Dean Rusk," he said. "The only contact I ever

have with the State Department is that I contact them before I go to Cuba. I explain what my mission is and ask them if my activities would be in any way inconsistent with our national policy. If they ever said no, I wouldn't make the trip, but so far they haven't."

Doesn't Know Policy
"I honestly couldn't tell you right now what our official national policy is toward Cuba. When I first went down there Castro would ask me about Washington's intentions toward Cuba and I always told him I wasn't there to represent the United States. I was there on a private humanitarian mission."

What is it that keeps driving him on missions that involve danger to his health and a financial sacrifice? He thought about that for a while and then said:

"Well, you're at the Havana airport standing beside the steps as the prisoners get on the plane. There is fear on their faces and they are white with prison pallor."

"After the plane takes off, they begin to relax. Sometimes when they see the coast of Florida they smile. Those smiles are reward enough for me."

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TALKS COSTLY — New York attorney James B. Donovan, who negotiated the release of Castro-held Bay of Pigs invasion prisoners, rests his hand on law book during interview in his New York office recently. — UPI Telephoto

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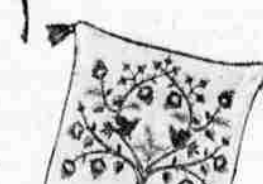
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