

Castro's Guest: Donovan's Son

By NORMAN THOMAS

To convince Fidel Castro that he was sincere in his bargaining for the release of 27 imprisoned Americans, James B. Donovan played a gimmick.

He used his own 18-year-old son.

He told The New York Post today that on one of his trips into Castro's Communist stronghold he took along his boy, John -- "and you might call that the ultimate in gamesmanship," the ruddy-complexioned, 47-year-old attorney smiled.

"The boy played an important part in these negotiations," he said. "Castro was enormously pleased to meet him and he was completely taken by my self-confidence in bringing him."

The bearded dictator even took the youth—a student at Northwood School in Lake Placid—skin diving and spear fishing with him. Donovan has color pictures of the two in blue Caribbean waters.

Donovan, home again after effecting the release of the last 27 Americans from Castro's prisons, said he and Fidel had often spoken of their children.

"Castro has a 14-year-old boy," Donovan said. "He had no idea I would bring my boy down there. In fact, some of his advisers were telling him that I was dangerous, that I was playing the same decoy role that the Japanese ambassador was playing here for Pearl Harbor. He was impressed when I showed up with the boy."

Donovan, a master negotiator who operates in that Alice-in-Wonderland world when countries don't recognize one another, made another revelation to The Post: "It wasn't Castro's idea that we release those four," he said, referring to four Cubans who had been held in prisons here -- Francisco ("The



JAMES DONOVAN

He had a gimmick.

Hook) Molina del Rio and three suspected saboteurs. "It was my idea. I had to interest him in it."

He made the suggestion three months ago when delays in shipments of \$53,000,000 in drugs, medicines and baby foods threatened to foul up negotiations. It was a way of making up for the delays. (Americans still owe Cuba three shiploads of goods.)

"Molina was an important figure in Havana because he was regarded there as a political prisoner. He was the most important in our negotiations," Donovan said.

The exchange was all worked out — with the federal government and Gov. Rockefeller — before Donovan went back to Cuba last Saturday.

"Of course I wasn't sure until we were over international waters bound for Florida that everything was all right. That's when I opened four bottles of champagne."

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