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THE EXODUS

By Charles Portis
Of The Herald Tribune Staff

After almost a year of frustration and success, of lonely night flights to Havana and endless haggling with Premier Castro, James B. Donovan reported yesterday that his Cuban adventure was over — mission accomplished.

He is to return to the United States today with the last 37 American prisoners in Cuba and will be followed later in week by a ship carrying 1,000 refugees.

Mr. Donovan, the 47-year-old Brooklyn lawyer who doubled as an international negotiator, also had good news for the friends and relatives of the thousands of political prisoners still in Cuban jails. The unpredictable Dr. Castro is opening their cases for review.

Some have already been granted clemency releases, and more will probably be released "in due course," said Mr. Donovan. Any one seeking clemency for a particular should mail pertinent information to the Minister of Interior in Havana, he said.

With the new refugee arrivals this week—possibly Wednesday—the Donovan mission will have brought more than 5,000 Cubans and Americans safely out of Cuba—including, notably, the 1,113 prisoners captured in the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion.

Mr. Donovan arrived in Havana Saturday on a DC-6 plane chartered by the Red Cross and ended his negotiations yesterday. The time and place of his arrival today is not known.

He chose to release his news in a roundabout fashion. He was scheduled to speak yesterday at a breakfast meeting of the Police Department's Holy Name Society. But since he was detained in Cuba, he sent a lengthy telegram to his Brooklyn office to be read in lieu of the speech.

"I have been informed by the government of Cuba," it began, "that tomorrow I shall leave Havana for the United States with all the Americans now serving prison terms in Cuba. Many of these men have been imprisoned for over three years and tomorrow can be reunited with their families. . . . The end of this mission is imminent and accordingly it is not my present intention to make additional trips to Cuba in furtherance of the mission."

Former U. S. Surgeon General Leonard A. Scheele, a vice-president of Lambert Pharmaceutical Co., read the telegram to the 3,100 policemen gathered for breakfast in Brooklyn's St. George Hotel. Dr. Scheele was active in rounding up medical supplies used for ransom of the prisoners.

The release of the Americans and the refugees involves no further quid pro quo, said Mr. Donovan. "It is an act of clemency on the part of the Cuban government."

The refugees, most of whom are related to Cuban exiles already in the U.S., will be ferried across to Florida on the freighter American Surveyor, which docked in Havana yesterday with 8,000 tons of barter goods.

It was the sixth ship load of medical supplies and baby food delivered to Cuba under the \$53 million ransom agreement with Castro. About 30 per cent remains to be delivered. Mr. Donovan said the antibiotics "have already resulted in the dramatic saving of the lives of many Cuban children."

Mr. Donovan was clearly happy that the difficult job was over. He had won his case through skill and dogged persistence, and most of the loose ends were neatly tied up.

But he was still a little annoyed over "groundless speculation by certain elements of the press" that he had been acting as a government agent all along.

"It has been understood from the commencement of this mission," said the telegram, "that I would be wholly unauthorized to represent any United States position in that [foreign policy] area. Our mission has always been private in nature, with the sole humanitarian objective of saving lives."

The "our" refers to the Cuban Families Committee for Liberation of Prisoners of War, who called on Attorney General Robert Kennedy last June for help. Their "traders-for-prisoners deal" with Castro had just fallen through, and they didn't know what to do next.

The Attorney General suggested they get a representative who would take a less emotional approach, a hard-headed negotiator who could get things done.

Mr. Donovan, he said, would be just the man. A former OSS agent and prosecutor in the Nuremberg trials, he had defended the Soviet spy Rudolf Abel, and stepped off the unprecedented spy-for-spy exchange last year for U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers. He knew

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James B. Donovan

how such things were done. In July Mr. Donovan agreed to take the Committee's case without fee, and in August had his first conference with Castro in Havana.

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