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06JUN89 CUBA: MILITARY TRIAL BECOMES BIG MEDIA EVENT IN CUBA.

By Lionel Martin

HAVANA, July 6, *Reuter* - A usually reserved ambassador to Cuba from a European nation says that every night for almost a week he could not take his eyes away from the television screen.

An office secretary says she couldn't stop from crying during the emotional testimony of a defendant.

And even if you turned off your television while the trial of 14 Cuban officials on drug trafficking and other charges was being shown, you would be likely to hear the broadcast from a neighbour's set.

The television coverage of the trial, which ended late on Tuesday, has become the Cuban equivalent of American telecasts of the Watergate hearings or the presidential debates.

"It was so dramatic, more so than any motion picture, because you knew that the actors were not actors and that they might really be shot," the ambassador said.

The trial was broadcast nightly for three hours as the 14 former military and state security officers, including two generals, faced charges before a Military Tribunal of corruption, drug trafficking and hostile acts.

The latter charge is related to their role in helping drug runners ship cocaine to the United States.

The defendants pleaded guilty and the three generals acting as judges have five days to decide the penalties under Cuban military law.

The penalties could include death for seven of the defendants.

"It had all the ingredients of a...spy novel, intelligence agents, drug traffickers and secret contacts with the enemy against the backdrop of strained U.S.-Cuban relations," the ambassador said.

Cuban President Fidel Castro commented to a group of ambassadors that the streets and roads of Havana had been virtually deserted while the trial was being aired.

The three stern generals conducted the proceedings with military correctness as the bald, bespectacled prosecutor, a man with a reputation for being jovial, became a fierce defender of revolutionary principles whose words dripped with sarcasm, anger and emotion as he tongue-lashed the defendants;

Arnaldo Ochoa, a man who had been a general, the commander of Cuban forces in Ethiopia and a much-decorated national hero, radiated a devil-may-care courage as he asked the court to give him the death penalty;

And there were also the identical twin brothers de la Guardia, both members until a few days ago of Cuba's state security apparatus, standing side by side with mirror image expressions of remorse written across their faces.

Antonie de la Guardia, a former colonel, faces the death penalty. He was the chief of a secret department within the state security whose job it was to circumvent the U.S. economic embargo on trade with Cuba.

It was his department that cooperated with international drug traffickers by letting them use Cuban territory, in exchange for money, as a midway point in shipping cocaine into the United States.

Eduardo Diaz, another defendant, seemed terrified as he answered questions through gritted, chattering teeth. He also faces the death penalty.

Each of the 14 defendants were contrite and acknowledged their guilt.

Each said they worked under orders of Ochoa and de la Guardia and that the leadership of the Cuban government and party had no knowledge of their activities.

The official party newspaper said the trial was televised "to show how Cuba could wash its outrage" in full view of the world.

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