# POSITION ONE

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## Norberto Fuentes



REVOLUCION

LO QUE TRAMAN LOS YANQUIS EN LA O.E.A.:

# PROYECTAN UNA POLICIA MILITAR

Presión sobre varios Gobiernos

Granma

EDICION UNICA

1968 AÑO DEL GUERRILLERO HEROICO

"LA CADENA"

por VIDAL

N ESPANA

ni la Iglesia ni nadie es libre para decir la verdad de lo que está ocurriendo

DEBE MANTENERSE POR S TIEMPO EL SILENCIO

be a Cuba a decir lo que se sobre Franco padre Inaki Aspiazu

REARAN

¡Estos Yanquis..!

AMENAZA NIXON A CUBA

Pide a los Capitalistas que no Inviertan

HABLO COMO UN MAGNATE DE EMPRESA

La Calle

5 cts. Diario de la Revolución Cubana

Orden de alarma de combate

LA NACION HA AMANECIDO EN PIE DE GUERRA

Fidel hoy por Radio-TV

¡Listos para repeler la agresión imperialista!

Hoy

POLICIA:

CANTANDO

MUELEN

ADQUIERE

El INRA otra henequenera

ATACA A CUBA

Imprimirán planimetría de Cayo Largo

TEXTO COMPLETO

Sospechosa actitud de La Voz Dominicana

ARRASADAS

DESTACADOS

escritores elogian la Revolución

JUECES DE UN CONCURSO

A LA VENTA EL PRIMER No. DE LA REVISTA INRA

PITTRE

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# POSITION ONE

OAK
PORTICO

# POSITION ONE

## Norberto Fuentes





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To Rubén Fonseca Guevara,
captain of the Sierra Maestra
and always in combat.

"You cannot manufacture old comrades."

Saint-Exupéry

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# POSITION ONE

*Cuba*, June, 1965

They talk about beer, they always talk about beer; they really miss it. Sweaty glass overflowing with foam. Then you wipe your mouth with your shirtsleeve and you feel the cold, bitter liquid. You refill your glass and see how the yellow stream opens the foam in the center of the glass and the bottle stands empty on the table.

–Another one, old buddy?

–Let's have it!

And when they hand over the new bottle, from the other clump of cane, they call out:

–Hey, let's fool around less and cut more!

–Let's cut caane! – they all shout, and then the beer disappears and the *macheteros* are faced with the impenetrable wall of cane: clumps of ten and twelve stalks, tall, proud, that challenge the *machetero*: "Here I am, bend down, cut me down, over and over again." And the *machetero* seizes the cane by the throat, he seizes all the stalks that he can get his hand around, he squeezes them hard, casts his cutlass at them and knocks them down at one blow. But two or three remain standing, two or three more, for five or six months, two or three more stalks of cane, bend over, here I am, it's me, so bend.

We call the boss Whatshername. He told us: anyone who gets involved with a farm woman is going to have to marry me. We

laughted and then we thought: "Man, you know, you better be careful, strolling around the streets of Havana hanging on Whatshername's arm would really be a sight."

When the olivegreen army shirts get sweaty, they have white stripes. The gunners' shirts are filled with white stripes. The best time to see them is lunchtime, after they wash their faces and look cool and *macho*. That's not the way they look in the trucks on the way back from the fields, or in the canefields themselves when they get lost among the cane.

At lunchtime they're all together, in the shade, and they eat standing up, Lefty, Red, Domingo, Benerando, Whitey, Pititi, Miguel Calaña, Little Babalú[1], Evaristo, Chucho. Names of antiaircraft gunners.

On February I they organized their first Brigade of Antiaircraft Canecutting Gunners. On April 9 the 32 gunners had cut a million *arrobas* of cane and their prize, they asked to be sent to fight in Vietnam.

When the cane is ready for cutting it resembles a virgin girl: the cane opens up, splits in two and with just one little blow, she's down. The cutlass makes the cane lighter, the earth can't even hang on to it any more. When it rains it's easier to cut the cane, you want it to rain to cool off but then you don't like it because everything is sticky and your clothes get all clammy on your body and the sweat runs down your face and you take your hat off to cool off your hair.

Sugar cane is a contradiction, a friend and an enemy all in one. The manual cutters, the *macheteros*, sign up as volunteers to cut it: with every cut stalk, the wealth of the nation increases, everybody knows that, right, but when you're doing it, you cut the cane with hate, it's a battle between brigades and canefields. The cane grows and grows, it gets all twisted down at the roots, it puts up a fight,

[1] Name refering to one of the gods in the religion of African origin known as *santería* or *Ocha ruk*.

it marches long distances. This battle has casualities, the ones who give in, it has heroes, and victorious brigades. Now, you don't think about any of this in the fields, where your arm hurts and there is no end to the cane, now one down, get the next but there's always another standing, waiting, and you have to bend over to bow down before it to knock it down. At times your cane gets all tangled up with other canes or gets lost under the cane straw and you've got to pull it out. And you do all this with the sun like a heated overcoat and the earth blazing, with the gusts of wind few and far between, so you never get to fill your lungs. Time stands still in the cane, in the field, and the cane is king, then, afterwards, man is, but you always wonder: it'll grow again next year and you'll be bending over, bowing over before it. The older men talk with respect of the cane: "Cane is though", and they show their tough hands; the younger men treat it is as if it were a whore: "daughter of the whoremother", but the cane pays no heed: it is just there, millions of stalks of cane, standing there, in the canefield.

I'm Babalú. I take the coffee to the fields and give it out. If Babalú doesn't hand out coffee, Babalú cuts off his own snout. Now, the whole name is Tiny Babalú. I couldn't join the Party because I see dead people and ghosts. I tell myself: Babalú, you got to be a materialist," but the ghosts keep on showing up. My real name is Pedro Manuel Barrera, but I like Babalú better, Tiny Babalú, I'd slice my nose right off if I couldn't take the coffee around.

Uncle Papo was the soul of the Brigade. "When I'm not around, people just don't feel good," he used to say, and it was true: since he left, everybody misses him.

"He had two different ways of walking", they say, and did we ever laugh, that Papo was really something! He'd imitate a lame guy or a moron and we always got a good laugh. When we'd be off, he stayed behind and we called out: "Uncle Papo, come on with your funny walk!" And he went along doing like this with his leg and we'd be off laughing again.

–He gave all of us names. One day he had a few beers and was falling on his feet in the canefield. Attenshun, soljuhs! he boomed out, and the Lieutenant stared at him, really angry.

–But Uncle Papo failed us. One day he took leave and stayed in Havana for ten days, then he came back and said he was "sick" and had to head back to Havana. We kicked him out. We didn't smile at all, but that's the way it is in a war.

Cane, listen here, you cane, fall over, here come the gunners, real men gunners that scrub down with steelwool to bathe and wear ties made out of barbed wire! Hear that, cane?

The second day is the decisive one, the people who stick it out in the cane after the second day can stand the whole harvest. On the second day everything hurts. You can't close your hand, the cane won't fall with one cutlass blow and you have to hit at it several times, your back aches and you don't know if it's better to be lying down or standing.

Maceo is the political instructor of the Brigade, everyone calls him "commissar" like in the Soviet Army or the Spanish Civil War. The harvest is tough for Maceo:

"I never cut cane before and here I have to set an example. Now I'm all in one piece, now I'm a canecutter. The doctor said I had something wrong with my spine, but that doctor doesn't know a thing."

Maceo's tribune is the bed of the truck or the canefield.

"How are the men of this Brigade?" he asks.

"All in one piece, Maceo, all in one piece!" they reply in chorus, and he says: "Well, we'll see if that's true."

–Juanita, if you love me, I won't go out for a whole year, I'll work without stopping until I can build a house for you. We'll make it look really nice, with strong beams. We'll line it with palm bark, and put down a cement floor in the parlor. And we'll pass our time there, like a couple of baby buzzards."

Euspicio's outlass slipped and he hurt his right foot, Babalú cut his left one, Whitey got hit in the face and the eyes with a cane. You just don't think in the canefield, just grab three or four, hold it down and cut, throw it on the pile, grab three or four, cut, throw,

this sun, this sweat, this cane, cut four and throw them, then start on a new clump.

When you hear about all the people getting hurt, you say: I'm careless, I have to pay attention to what I'm doing, but then the cane makes you forget everything.

In the canefield the ferrets eat the rats and suck on the sweetest cane. The *garzas* eat lizards, the worms and the toads. The men cut, and you smell that acid odor that comes from their bodies, unpleasant in the others but you can't smell your own.

Position One is the top combat position, waiting for the order to fire. The antiaircraft gunners are the only soldiers who take up Position One twice a day, at dawn and sunset, when the light is hazy and planes take advantage of that to attack.

Sleep, you never sleep enough, you sleep and cut, there is always too much cutting, but never too much sleep. You never begin and you never finish sleeping, it is a long chain since you arrive in camp the first day right down the last day. At four in the morning you wake up automatically, looking up at the dark roof that in reality you can't see, you straighten your blanket, warm up under it and deep inside you hope there's no moon, that everything's black as pitch so you can't take off for the field so early. Hope lasts for a moment, then someone shouts: On your feet! That shout disturbs your whole body and no one replies.

You get out of bed and say nothing, just the necessary words: Pass me the soap, let's have the towel. Some fall back to sleep and there's another shout: Gunners, on your feeet! The laggards answer: "Coming, coming now." They speak without any intention of moving, to win a few more minutes in bed, under the warm blanket, and maybe, who knows, they might even be forgotten and be left to sleep late into the morning.

But then they are awakened one at a time. Come, you, on your feet! Clothes are cold at dawn and boots are hard. Then comes the coffee, that makes your empty stomach hurt. The truck and the road, where no one speaks.

Finally the cane appears before us, covered with sticky dew that splatters clothing and makes it even chillier.

They thought the sun was an enemy, a Yankee agent. But Commander Raúl explained that the sun was very strong and very bothersome but that it was ours.

Gloves grow hard, stiff, from sweat and soil. At midday you'd like to sleep but don't always manage it, sweat runs down your chest and face. This is a war. The gunners are like ants in the canefield. When you cut two clumps of cane you forget why you're doing it, you don't earn any money for it, the work is mechanical. Canecutter, field loader, mill, economy, Revolution, all that is forgotten and only the cane in front and the sun above remain; the cane, that long, green stalk that gets twisted and fights to keep from being cut, then the whole thing seems stupid and only class spirit makes you cut more.

Whenever you walk in the country you should always carry a machete, that's what country people say.

Please, comrade, give me a cigarette, one of those real strong ones that will tear out my throat. If you don't give me one, Comrade, I'll wish a shooting star hits you in the head. A twelve noon shooting star. Thanks for the cigarette, Comrade. How's your cutting? Finish it today? Good for you, Comrade. I'm going try to get through mine today too. Got a match, Comrade?

"I'd love to know why I'm here" says Valdivia. "I'm always like that. The only day I didn't shout or laugh was the day they hit me with a 45 bullet alongside my spine. There were 30 bandits and 25 of us. I thought it was a scratch but when the fighting was over I couldn't get up."

Ten or twelve canestalks make a clump. One, two, four rows of clumps make up the cutting; 30, 40 cuttings are the square of cane. Being a canecuter is a profession, it means looking at the square and saying: "This is 60 thousand cane", that is, 60 thousand *arrobas*, without any mistakes in the estimate. It means being able to grab four canes at once, throw them straight onto the pile, cut right, "a sideways cut, all at once, close to the ground", using a *mocha* instead of a machete because "the *mocha* is heavier and the body makes less of an effort."

*Macheteros* hate the *caguazo*, the skinny, strawcovered cane that doesn't weigh a thing and gets all twisted up; *macheteros* prefer *Media Luna* and *Puerto Rico* varieties of cane, thick and sweet, erect.

If the cane is very bad we burn it to get rid of the straw. My nose is so big, it gets smudged in the burnt cane and the boys ask me: "Valdivia, you sniff the cane or cut, hey, Valdivia?"

In the cane you miss women, you need something soft to touch, here all there is to touch is the wooden handle of the *mocha*, the dry earth and the sticky cane. You're a man, you need warmth. A woman around here was half in love with me, naturally I liked that, but I have my woman. So I didn't say anything to her and she asked me if I was a man or not, I got mad, I said I was a man ready for anything, that I was a Rebel soldier and that meant a man twice over.

Catalino is an eagle. Catalino is Cata. Catalino is the third in command of the Brigade. He sent his children to Oriente and when he saw the empty house he started to cry, he sent them away because his house is very small, in fact it doesn't really exist, it's just a five by five room. Cata has been in the Rebel Army for seven years. "I'm an old soldier."

"Four peasants and a Haitian tried to take half a *caballería* of land away from me. We fought it out with machetes. I got the Haitian in the neck and the other on the arm, they ran off, they couldn't beat Cata but they cut me in the left side, my guts came out, and they broke four ribs on me. They had to take 28 stitches with no anesthetic, just a needle and thread, it hurts me in the rainy season. They cut me down like I was a cane."

Catalino averages 700 *arrobas* of cane a day. Some of the men say, rather spitefully: What's Cato think, that the cane's just for him?

– That a some crate of *lettuces*.
– Shit, Casildo, you're really learning grammar.
– That's nothing, look at those nice lettuces for salad.

Whatshername looks at the cane and says: "No progress, no progress. The cane always needs the machete. Once I knocked down 100 thousand *arrobas* with my eyes but when I's really cut, I knocked down just 250."

The sun bites and snashes at 12 noon, inside the sticky, scratchy cane, there is no escape, no shade, no breeze. There is traitorous cane, green cane, it hides among the good cane and when you cut it, your machete bounces off it.

The cutters develop hard muscles, more pressure and strength in their right hand. The cutter who strikes with his right fist might as well be striking with an iron. The cutters walk with open arms and legs.

Whatshername already walks like a *machetero*. He didn't used to be a *machetero*, now he is the Brigade leader and a *machetero*. The word *machetero* sounds like gunner. Whatshername is a lieutenant of *machetero* gunners.

From a 100 milimeter antiaircraft battery group to 32 machetes toppling cane. "Here you have to lead just the way you do in war, we've just left out the salutes."

The black dust of burnt cane gets into your beard and leaves a black shadow. The oxen eat the cane stalks. They won't eat the stalks of burnt cane, so they take the oxen to graze in other fields. I prefer death to a hard blow, says Mojena. When the cane is burnt, it is burnt at night and a column of gray smoke resembling the nuclear mushroom arises, at its base it is orange against the bluish mist of the sky. Above it spreads out, white, fat, with a thousand forms. Inside, the canefield explodes like a war. The weaseles and lizards and rats flee. Around the canefields there are palmtrees, almacigo and scrub growth. Almacigo leaves cures stomache, you chew the leaves to swallow the juice says Mojena, while he cuts the cane that was burned yesterday.

"Even though Mexico isn't socialist, I'd like to visit there. Men go around with guns there and I like guns. Pistols solve all problems. I'm a sergeant and I head an antiaircraft gun, I rather be a shooter."

Benerando is a tall bamboo that is bent over on top. At lunch time he takes his little transistor radio and tunes in the Mexican music hour. Sweat glistens on his nose and between his eyebrows.

"I wanted a revolver and I saved for a long time. Finally I bought a 45 and headed for my hometown. I arrived proud as can be with my 45 in my bélt. On Sunday I rounded up the boys in town and took them to a spot to shoot with the revolver. It exploded with the first shot, broke two of my fingers. Since then I've never been back there."

Soup is what they like best, soup, rice and steak. If I fry them bananas, all hell breaks loose. Sometimes I hunt up some tomatoes. I cut the wood. I watch them to see if they like the meal. I really take an interest in pleasing them. My happiest moment is when they say: "the best cook in the harvest is our Beltran"; when they say that, I make them a double portion of fried bananas.

The prize in the canefield is a smile from Maceo, a word from Whatshername. Still a man there? Yes, *compay* Maceo, still a man here. Hey, Mojena, how long before you finish your cutting? I'll get it down one, two, Lieutenant, how's yours? So it goes.

Another prize is night. Bed, stories, smoking. Radames, tell the story about the time you went to town. No, Babalú should tell the one about his father. No, I like Mojena's one about his maiden aunt. What maiden aunt? The one you found in the canefield with Masabí.

The candlelight flickers and your eyes hurt but the thick strokes of the *macheteros* fill pages, letters, outside Benerando listens to the evening Mexican music program. Valdivia tells his stories about his days in the Fight against Counterrevolutionary Bandits.

Casildo tells about his trip to the Soviet Union, when he won the cane cutting emulation: "There was so much snow you just froze. Oh, Casildo, come on! *Compay*, I swear it's true!"

Early in the morning you cut blindly, by instinct. They did it many times to reach one hundred *arrobas*. The *macheteros* started cutting and collapsed on the clumps of cane. "It hurt so much that we warned up our hides with fire or stuck our hands into cold water," says Pititi. "I still can't close my hands right." Uncle Papo's muscles hurt so that he cried and cut at the same time. "It's me, Pititi, that says it, and if there's some other Pititi, he must be made of mud."

At four in the morning I wake up and I always see Euspicio, with his tall body, looking out, the open door makes a frame of light and he stands within that frame. "He has the face of a runaway slave," Benerando said to me. One morning I got up before he did and I looked out. It was all dark and all you could see was the moon wrapped in mist.

On the central beam of the barracks is a mirror, the only one in the Brigade, they all look at their faces and stroke their beards as they pass by it.

Brotherhood is a necessity. It is important for Whatsehername to lend his pistol to the ones who take leave. For Mojena to leave his money on the bed "so the boys can take what they need." For Beltran the cook, to prepare food the way each person likes it. "Cata doesn't like milk so I send him soda pop, Mello has a big stomach so I give him more." That's important, there isn't any written order but it is the first law of the Brigade.

The clods of earth that cling to boots are bothersome but there is no way of getting rid of them. Casildo wants to be a pilot and he points out a cloud to say so. Makario's real name is Antonio, Makario is the jeep driver and he is a military draft recruit. The Brigade members have given him ranks: lieutenant Makario, Major Makario, General, Captain. Lugo is the driver of the Zil truck, which he calls Ciriaco: "this is my Ciriaco."

I'm leaving now, I'm leaving the Brigade. I leave Domingo with his knapsack filled with schoolbooks. Belén, the veterinarian who takes care of the canecutters. Eleodoro, Medino, Chimbi, Félix Vargas, Fajardo, Carlos Cue, Ramiro, Delfin. Marshal Makario starts up the jeep. I say goodbye to the Brigade at breakfast time, they give me a *mocha* for a present. I leave them behind, they lift their left fists to say farewell, I lift mine too. The leavetakings of revolutionaries must be sadder than other people's. Revolutionaries have to say goodbye many times. Here I met up again with Valdivia, from the Fight against Counterrevolutionary Bandits, Blanquito, the gunner from San Antonio. When and where will I meet them again? I look but, but I can no longer see them clearly, I can't tell the difference

between Maceo and Whatshername and Domingo and the cane and the *mochas*. I know they are there. They are with me, too, man by man, in these notes that have come to an end.

# MORTARS 82; BATTERY OF THE 117

Thursday, April 8, 1965

I met them during the October Crisis; they were setting up their 82 mortars millimeter in zigzagging trenches sunk in a recently worked field. It was the battery of battalion 117.

The mortar is a frontloading light artillery weapon. The 82's serve as support for the militia infantry. For the mercenaries positioned along the road to Playa Girón, the mortars of the 117 meant a rain of angry and insistent fire.

This year I went with them to visit the road where they fought. We searched the trenches occupied by the mercenaries, and we found rusty bullets, cases of howitzers, rotten bits of cloth.

We visited the monumented to the dead of the battalion, with its faded flag, and amidst the tall grass that gradually erases the scars of battle, the mortar gunners remembered.

It was half past four in the morning, we were in the Santa Clara airport. Comander Tomassevich arrived with 25 new trucks and the news flew through the battalion: "Landing on the south coast..."

Soon we were in the trucks and we still had no idea of what we would find in the southern part of the province. As we approached the local Ciénaga people along the way gave us the news and encouragement... "boys, be careful, lots of people are getting killed there... hit them hard..."

We saw groups of farm families. Teachers lined up their pupils along the road and they say the National Anthem. When we entered the villages, the notes began, as we left; they ended, to begin again in the next town.

We reached the Covadonga sugar mill. It became clear what we had ahead of us: a truck was burning, its occupants dead. There were no antiaircraft guns at the mill so the workers put bamboo poles on the roof so there would seem to be machineguns. The trucks dashed from one place to another. Four mercenaries were being held prisoner there, the local people wanted to lynch them and the militiamen hand to make a big effort to keep them from doing it...

We got out of the trucks and carried the mortars on our backs.

The mother of Primo Filguera, a member of the battalion, lived on the road out of Covadonga. When we passed by he said: "Look, I used to live there, now my mother lives there." Two hours later we sent a messenger to tell the old woman that Primo was dead. He fell fighting a kilometer from her house.

We had our most important encounter at kilometer 15. They were positioned on a curve in the road. They defended themselves with a .50, two 30's and a recoilless cannon.

When we started to fire at them, they ducked into a drainage pipe that crossed the road; there they emerged shouting, stopped the infantry and hid again.

That happened several times.

At four thirty in the morning we passed their bodies. They were face up, the mortar struck right in the middle. Two mercenaries hung from the barbed wire fences: the expansive wave of our grenades had catapulted them. We saw that our mortars also hit, and hit hard.

We had hardly rested when we were ordered to advance. Our infantry was at a standstill in a heavy clash with the mercenary advance at San Blas. The enemy was standing his ground there.

Our hands were burnt from handling the redhot tubes. The scout gave the order: we fired, rectified the shot, fired again until we fired 260 times.

The San Blas position was also occupied by our forces. The Ammunition ran out but no one said anything because we wanted to remain there. We didn't eat, because there was nothing to eat, nor was there any water at all. On the road, first one, then many more tins with food and water appeared. The people from the Ciénaga set them there in the middle of the road and went back to bring us more.

In the morning we were awakened by the explosion of a bomb. A B-26 was dropping napalm containers. The aircraft banked and flew over us again. It dropped the second bomb but it did not go off.

We all shot upward with our guns, rifles and pistols, but we didn't make a dent. The B 26 flew off in the direction from which it had come.

Then the time came when all there was was advancing and advancing. The resistance of the first hours was over. A jeep drove by and the people riding in it called out: We already took Girón, we already took Girón!

This year the mortar gunners went back to Girón. Above the swamp the sun burns with special insistence. There is no breeze, the air stands still. Only in the shade of some bushes do some feeble gusts play with branches and leaves.

I am with two mortar gunners, Curbelo and Tamayo. They say nothing, they look from one side to the other, they think and review the past. Today's serene tranquility must disturb them. Perhaps that was what the road was like the night before the attack: silence with the sun lording it over everything.

I see the nostalgia in the fighters, that memory of danger that one comes to miss, of four years ago, when the road exploded in dust and gunpowder and blood ran over the asphalt and bullets whistled and men died.

Time passes and we arrive at the Girón Victory school; the students march and then they mass around the fighters. I take one of the pupils aside and tell him: "These are fighters who fought here."

The boy looks at me, shaken, looks at them and tries to hug both men at once.

Everyone has tears in their eyes and the boy says: "...Fighters, fighters." Then I see that the two militiamen's nostalgia grows even greater.

# "P.C. 203 BAIRE"

Tuesday, April 13, 1965

"Haven't you ever been beaten with your hands tied? Haven't you ever been hit hard in the stomach and the face with your hands tied? That's the way they had us that morning, with our hands tied." Ensign Mendicuaga, with 36 years at sea, has a face covered with wrinkles and the wide leather belt that holds his pistol is too big for his waist.

An old seawolf, a man of war, he is marked by that special seal stamped by salt spray, or the distance from land or the starry nights without trees. Only his slender body, his slow walk distinguish him from those men with the sea stamped upon them. But he is a man of the sea, you can tell when he speaks of his boat: "it's an old ingrate, but it's my boat."

"His boat" no longer sails, it lies in the bottom of the Las Casas river on Isle of Pines. "His boat" was mortally wounded early in the morning of April 17 and Mendicuaga was also wounded; René, René Hernández, was wounded too, René who always accompanies him and who no longer wears sailor garb but olive green, with the yellow stripes of a sergeant and who says: "The sea is bad, she's real bad. I got my chest wounds on the sea. When I got better and went back, I got all out of breath; the sea didn't want me any more, even though I left my blood on her."

Then he says: "Now I'm really better, I'm all better and I know I'll be back soon."

– The "Baire" was our boat – says Mendicuaga and he describes it with a sailor's gesture, beam, length, rig, a kind of coastguard boat, made in the United States at the end of World War II. It had a 3.50 cannon and four 20 mm machineguns. What we knew best were the two Hamilton 1 000 HP engines because we were the engine men of the "Baire."

Those engines have a special meaning for Mendicuaga, Hernández and other engine men machinists of the "Baire": two old American engines. One is breaking and there are no spare parts. The "Baire" must continue in service, there are no more boats. The men meet. They take the two engines and make one that works. The "Baire" takes to sea, an invalid. It takes to sea.

Now the engine is full of water, and it is no longer an engine, just some scrapiron that rusts away on the bottom of the sea.

Sergeant René Hernández tells the tale: "the engines of the boats are under the deck. I saw Mendicuaga run down the ladder and shout: 'Start the engines, fast, they're attacking us!'"

–Yes – says Mendicuaga –, it was a foggy morning. We saw a B 26 approach and it moved the way they do in salute, a short, smooth salute, like this, with its wings. Since it bore Cuban insignias we didn't think anything was wrong. It made a second pass and was accompanied by a four engine because the B 26 has just two engines. This time it greeted us with the 50 mm's the four engine too. Shells filled the deck and the combat alarm was given in the whole unit.

"With our engines turned on, we could hear the roar of battle above our heads. Then realized it was a rocket fight, 50 mm rockets against our rickety machineguns. Three out of our four antiaircraft guns were put out of commission and the only good one fired very old shells that didn't explode. Our hands were tied.

"From the bridge the skipper, Reyes, ordered us to go into reverse. Suddenly to starboard we felt a hard blow, as it had been made by a huge hammer in a giant's fist, on the hull. Everything shook and when I went to pull the reverse gear, I couldn't; I was wounded in my head, chest and one leg. Also, I couldn't see because

the electricity was out. I heard René say: 'Look what they've done to me'; and another voice that replied: 'You're hit bad, real bad.'

"Outside the firing and the battle went on, but just on one side. They flew over us again and again. The pilots were right on target. The rockets were fired right at the line of floatation and the engine room began to fill with water. Inside there there was blood all over and an odor of gasoline and explosives mixed. Sea. Sea and blood. And the only light came from the tracer bullets of the mercenary aircraft across the deck and lighted up the cabin with its deadly light.

"The battle ended. Then they went away but before they did, I could see them one more time, because my mates pulled me on deck and I could see the planes final passes. I also saw that we weren't the only wounded, there was a lot of blood there.

– When they brought me up on deck, says René, I saw the skipper, Reyes, firing at them with a 45 pistol, he shouted to them and our only antiaircraft gun continued to fire its old shells, rhythmically, but they were so old, that they struck the aircraft but didn't go off: they didn't go off, they didn't go off...

And on the "Baire" were left the dead bodies and the wounded, the salt spray and the gunpowder and the hatred that people feel when they are struck in the face with their hands tied.

– They didn't go off, they didn't go off, but some day we'll see them again face to face and then things will be different.

# THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENT

*Hoy*, Friday, April 16, 1965

Do you know what is the most important moment? It is the one when we are both alone, when no one stops us, in that machinegun boxing that always ends in death, of one or the other or of both, and that is the only conceivable way of dying.

The pilots speak with their hands; the right hand is used to play the role of your own plane, and the left hand is the enemy's, or vice versa, but they always talk with their hands. Fernández speaks with his hands, Fernández is a pilot in our Air Force. On his second sally into the skies over the Ciénaga he shot down a mercenary bomber.

"At five past eight Monday morning he was flying a protection flight over the San Antonio base. Two mates were coming in for a landing after their mission and I was protecting them. As planes land they lose effectivity and if they come under attack they are easy targets. So I circle around and around over San Antonio protecting the pilots who were landed.

"Then I got a message from ground control:

"*711, control here, 711 go to Jagüey Grande zone, a B 26 is bombing the infantry, control...*

"711 was the number of my jet, a US-made T 33 in very bad condition, the engine could not be used at full power. After 25 minutes I was over to Ciénaga.

"I looked down and to the sides, as far I my neck could stretch, and I did some turns looking. Below I could see the ships inside the bay. I was flying at four thousand meters.

"At three thousand meters, below, between Playa Girón and Playa Larga, flying over the sea, I saw the enemy plane. This is the most important moment, the most desired by all combat pilots: the flight in the air to knock down the enemy plane.

"The enemy plane began to fall back. I cut the gas and lifted my nose so the air masses could stop the craft. Immediately let it slide to the right and the plane made a complete zero in the air, turned on itself and I threw it at the B 26 that which was now flying forward.

"I dropped like an arrow; the B 26 was flying light because he had dropped all his bombs. When you go into combat you become one more machine in the plane.

"To do the operation I pulled the stick back against my chest, with my left hand I pushed the accelerator forward, with my foot I moved the left fin pedal, when I did the turn and the aircraft went completely upside down, I accelerated and pulled the T 33 on a level. I did all those maneuvers without taking my eyes off the enemy plane.

"I approached its tail and connected the electronic firing devices of the two 50's. The B 26 came even closer. To shoot you have to wait until the target fills the site from wing to wing, that happens at 800 meters, but I went up as 100 meters away, I didn't want to miss.

"At that distance, he noticed my presence and tried to turn to fight or slip away. I pulled the firing device up close and then swerved to the left. I passed by and saw he was giving off white smoke.

"Some red balls crossed in front of me and I gained altitude. I went back and tried to get a look at the B 26. I looked for a few seconds and saw how it crashed sideways with an explosion, hitting the Playa Girón airstrip first with the right wing and then the whole fuselage.

"I was very happy and started to sing. My T 33 floated right along, better than ever, and I felt like the lord of the air. I was heading home; I speeded up with the left and levelled off the control stick."

Three of the planes that fought at Playa Girón are outside a green building at the San Antonio base: a B 26, a Sea Fury, a T 33. The T 33 is the same 711 flown by Fernández.

Now 711 is silent, kept as a museum piece out there on the grass. The two 50's have no ammunition, there is no pilot in the cabin; it is enveloped only in the awesome memory of three days. Three days for an epic feat.

# SOLDIERS OF SILENCE

*Granma Magazine*, September, 25, 1966

A plane crosses the Havana sky with the roar of its turbojet engines. The pilot requests permission for descent on sighting Varadero: he presses the control buttons and the aircraft docilely begins to descend.

"Use strip number three" says the control tower and the four engine craft tilts its wings to participate in the whirlwind of the city. It is late. Havana tiredly receives the still-warm night breeze. Life moves, stops and turns along its asphalt rivers. People sink into dreams and anxiety: the fear of death and the need to create and to love.

Beside the sea a mount of rocks and reefs arises and upon them, an antiaircraft battery and in the background the four decade old mass of the Hotel Nacional.

And on those rivers of asphalt rivers and walls and buses and factories and even further away, upon the voluptuous waves, among the clefts between the mountains and in the thirsty furrows, a subterranean world moves, but it moves upon the earth: it is the secret world of State Security in battle against the United States intelligence service and the counterrevolution.

## A BANDIT HEADS FOR HAVANA

A bandit, Pitti Hernández, left the Escambray mountains and headed for Havana. It was 1964. When Pitti decided to get out of the armed struggle business, he turned to good advantage a careless moment of the men of his group and said farewell to the Escambray. He plunged into the depths of the capital, and the Department of State Security (DSE) lost track of him.

Some members of the most hunted, hard hit bands took advantage of any opportunity to desert from their groups to head for the cities or less complicated areas.

Others, even though their bands were not under pressure from the revolutionary forces, fled in moral defeat, frustrated or simply because of personal problems and squabbles.

Young, with a square face topped with thick curly hair, neatly combed back, the fugitive Pitti managed to find a haven in the home of some friends. The house was in the Apolo district on the outskirts of the city.

The man who wanted to terrorize the Escambray night was transformed into a tranquil being who waited. That was all that remained of the would-be counterrevolutionary fighter.

A large garden planted tastefully and a tile porch served as the entrance to Pitti's hideaway. Inside, Pitti had said: "I'm a tough man, the G-2[2] will never get me alive."

## REMINGTON 45

Pitti held his well greased pistol. He pressed the button beside the trigger and the cartridge slid through the slot of the handle. He

[2] In Cuba, during this period, the bodies for State Security or Counterintelligence were known as G-2.

counted the bullets: seven bullets. He read behind the cartridge: Rem. Cal. 45: a thunder blast in the chest of any human being.

"The G-2 will never get me alive."

"I'm a real tough man. I say that's the way it is, and that's the way it is. That's just what I told Luis Vargas when we quarrelled. That's the way it is. I can't take you, Luisito Vargas. So I left the guerrillas and that dirty Escambray that flooded my back with sweat and my feet with bloody sores. I'm like that, a man of my word, when I say something, that's that."

On the secret "List of Escambray bands and bandits" prepared in 1962 with reports obtained by State Security (and for the DSE's own interval use) the section on Luis Vargas' group reads as follows:

"A band in the developing stage. Made up of nine men. Pesonnel: a major, two captains, three first lieutenants, one second lieutenant, one soldier.

"Weapons: a Garand, two M 52's, a San Cristóbal, an M-1 carbine, a Thompson, a T-23 submachine gun. No more arms are known to be in their possession."

Further along the report stated:

"Major Luis Santana Gallardo aka Luis Vargas, armed with a Garand..." and further on: "first lieutenant José M. Hernández aka Pitti, armed with a San Cristóbal."

"The G-2 won't get me alive" thought Pitti in the solitude of his hideout.

## THE SECRET FLIGHT: DOCTOR TERRAECHE

Pitti Hernández got an opportunity to leave the country secretly. His brother Héctor knew from the old days a doctor with an unconcerned air despite his greying hair: Doctor Terraeche often visited the laboratory where Héctor worked.

Héctor learned from Terraeche himself that the preparations were under way for "a little trip, Héctor my friend, a little trip".

"Doctor" Héctor had confessed that day, in the doctor's ear "listen, Doctor, I have a brother..." Héctor told Terraeche the whole story. The doctor thought it would be just great to take a "man of the Escambray" on his yacht: the effect would be fine for arriving in Florida.

"Yes" he said "but you have to keep it all to yourself. Swallow your tongue because it could happen in a few days and, you know..."

A few hours later a blue and white two door Dodge stopped outside Pitti's hideout. A sun like molten steel bored down on the calm neighborhood. Two men got out of the car: Héctor, the unconcerned doctor and a young man, a friend of the doctor, clad in a colorful sports shirt. The three men seemed excited.

## BANDIT OFF TO THE UNITED STATES

The three men seemed excited because they were there to pick up Pitti. People were playing dominoes on the porch of the house, but Pitti wasn't at the table: he was sleeping in the last bedroom.

A slightly stooped woman greeted them: "Pitti is in back," she told Héctor. The woman thought she knew Doctor Terraeche. "Where have we met?" Héctor heard her ask, as he headed for the last room to find Pitti.

"Get a move on, you're heading North" Héctor said. Half asleep, Pitti took the news with a tremor of delight.

"There's a doctor with a boat in the living room and he's going to take you."

Pitti hurriedly grabbed his clothes and then his gun. Héctor stared for a long time at the pistol.

In a few minutes everything was ready. Héctor introduced his "travelling companions." Pitti happily shook the doctor's hand. Then they called the woman aside and told her: "Tomorrow at this time Pitti will be riding around Miami."

The woman smiled: "Doctor, take care of him over there."

When the car drove away from the quiet Apolo sector, it turned left and after ten minutes the four men were caught up in the stream of city traffic. The buildings moved along both sides of the windows. Pitti, seated in the back with his brother, saw Havana for the last time.

"Pitti" asked Héctor "did you bring your gun? I want you to show it to the doctor."

"A gun?" said Terraeche. "What do you want with a gun? Come on, boy, let's have it. I don't want any guns here. Do you want to ruin our escape? If a police car stops us and they find the gun, what are we supposed to say?"

Embarrassed, Pitti handed over the gun to Terraeche. The doctor carefully placed it under the seat.

No one spoke any more, until the doctor said, as he locked for Pitti's face in the rear view mirror:

"That's the end of Havana and the G-2 today!"

"The G-2, the G-2" mused Pitti aloud. The G-2 just couldn't get me after all."

Then, Pitti relaxed on the comfortable seat.

## THE G-2

"The G-2, the G-2" people say, and the enemy grows palid. But the men of Cuban counterintellingence rarely say G-2, they normally say "Security", that is, the Department of State Security.

We are going to speak of these soldiers without uniforms who penetrated the counterrevolution like a well honed knife. Soldiers

of silence that the enemy feels on his back with the weight of an army. The army of silence.

## THE FIRST INTELLIGENCE AGENT

Counterintelligence agents are fond of Belgian Browning nine millimeter pistols and Rolex underwater watches and rapid fire transmitters that can carry messages of state importance in fraction of a second.

But the first intelligent agent hardly knew the real existence of metal and if he used weapons, they were but a bundle of arrows. He used to measure time in days and nights and his only means of communication was the smoke signal.

That was a long time ago: the tribes began to fight in search of more food, skins, metals and slaves for work. The primitive community disappeared amidst the clashes of arrows and spears, clubs and animal skin shields.

Before the battles the tribal chiefs used to sent one or two warriors ahead of the troops. Those warriors had to be good observers and quick on their feet: they went to "spy" on the movements, number of men and weapons of the enemy.

With this information in their power, the tribal chiefs mapped out their battle plans.

Thus along with the first expression of the state (chiefs, wizards, military chiefs) the first spies came into existence, the first "intelligence agents."

## THE NEW INTELLIGENCE AGENT IS NOT A MAN

Since the period of the collapse of the primitive community down to our times, intelligence has been developed to the utmost.

The latest scientific advances are rapidly applied to military use, in the first place to intelligence. The new intelligence agents are not persons.

Spy satellites constantly fly over the entire earth's surface and obtain abundant photographic and radio information.

Allen Dulles, former director of the United States Central Intelligence Agency, wrote at the end of his book "The Craft of Intelligence:"

"If we have new Cubas... we will have one supreme final recourse: link up all the intelligence services of the free world..." In his book Dulles calls for the "use of all forces against communism".

That is the point of view of Dulles, the United States government and of the intelligence agencies. Intelligence applied against the national liberation movements, the liberated countries and the socialist camp.

"The communists have not always been successful in their ventures, and this is due to a large extent to the work of the intelligence services *in the aid of repression*." That much for Dulles.

## A SOVIET INTELLIGENCE AGENT

The Soviet intelligence agent Richard Sorge operated in Japan during World War II. Assembling a wide circle of friends in top Japanese spheres, Sorge succeeded in obtaining information fundamental for the development of the war: the Japanese would not attack the USSR. With this information in their hands the Soviet High Command could shift its troops from the Orient (where they were awaiting a Japanese attack) and send them to the Eastern Front in Europe, to fight Hitler's army.

Finally Sorge was caught and subjected to horrible torture; he told his captors:

"The Soviet Union does not want political conflicts or military clashes with other countries; nor does it have any interest in attacking Japan. Therefore, my group and I did not come to Japan as enemies. The usual concept of a spy cannot in any way be applied to us. The persons who have become spies of countries such as England or the United States look for Japan's weak points from the political, economic or military standpoint and direct their blows at them. In compiling information in Japan, our aims were very different. In 1935 we were sent off in Moscow by General Uritski, head of a Red Army department. The general instructed us that with our work we should seek to prevent the possibility of a war between Japan and USSR. During my stay in Japan, where I engaged in intelligence work, I firmly abided by that instruction from beginning to end."

## THE FUNCTIONS OF INTELLIGENCE

An intelligence agent has broad and varied duties: from obtaining economic or cultural information to sabotage, assassination or the promotion of guerrillas.

This is what is known as ideological, administrative, industrial and military sabotage.

The best known figure in intelligence is the spy and the main mission of the spy is to obtain information. Other "agents overseas" engage in the organization of military forces, establish contacts within the government or the army to recruit them for his service or network and other activities in the field of subversion or the underground world.

## FROM THE CHEKA TO THE DSE

The United States, as an essential display of its policy, has developed a numerous group of intelligence agencies. The CIA is the

principal one. Since the first days of the Cuban Revolution the CIA has tried to promote sabotage of all kinds against Cuba.

Intelligence agents cannot see with radar or pick up underwater signals with sonar. The intelligence agency does not advance in battalions nor have artillery support.

An intelligence agent is detected and captured by that other agency, every bit as mysterious and underground as the intelligence: the counterintelligence body.

(Each state carefully guards the way in which it works. Its methods are similar to those of the police entrusted with the detection and capture of criminals, although it possesses a broader range of technical resources. The western agencies estimate that there are five counterintelligence agents for every intelligence agent).

In order to combat the activities of US intelligence, the Revolution set up its counterintelligence agency, the Department of State Security.

Since the dawn of working class struggle, the class found it necessary, to create counterespionage bodies such as the Paris Commune's "vigilance committees". But the first large working class counterintelligence body was organized by the Bolshevik Revolution: Vladimir Ilich Lenin signed a decree on December 20, 1917 setting up the All Russia Extraordinary Commision (Cheka stands for its initials in Russian).

## WHEN INTELLIGENCE WAS NOT SO INTELLIGENT

Dictator Fulgencio Batista bragged about his intelligence services but in fact they were clumsy repressive groups.

The repressive agencies in Cuba were as numerous as in the United States. Dictator Gerardo Machado (1925-33) created the first of those agencies, the notorious *Porra* (club) and also a group of "experts."

the forties the Military Intelligence Service (SIM) was set up and under the direct instructions of imperialism, Batista organized a brand new one, the BRAC, the Bureau for the Reppression of Communist Activities. Other agencies were set up along the lines of the US bodies: the Regional Intelligence Service (SIR), the Naval Intelligence Service (SIN) and the Bureau of Investigations (BI).

## MISTER FBI

All the agencies worked in direct connection with the United States "intelligence community" especially with the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) the US counterintelligence agency.

Three foreigners could be seen daily in Batista's BI; they were the FBI's adviser-experts in Cuba.

Mister Clark Anderson, chubby and pleasant looking, who today works in the United States embassy in Spain; Mister Denit, tall and greyhaired, endowed with a potent hoarse voice; and one Mister García, sallow-hued and heavy shouldered.

The three experts arrived each morning at the Bureau of Investigations and filled their briefcases with reports on the underground movement that the Batista repressive services had succeeded in unearthing. The experts also daily visited the Immigration Department to obtain information on the international movements of Cuban and foreign travellers.

## CONFIDENTIAL

The organization of the repressive groups was similar in the different agencies: the Bureau of Investigations operated with three "confidential" departments: Confidential 1 worked on organized crime, Confidential 2 fought the Communists and Confidential 3 tapped telephones.

The FBI experts favorite Confidential was Number 2. This department acted autonomously within the Bureau of Investigations and in close coordination with BRAC. The FBI experts spent a large part of the morning in Confidential 2's offices.

## THE CUBAN NAME FOR A BATISTA AGENT: CHIVATO (STOOLPIGEON)

The Cuban "intelligence community" hardly worked like a precision machine. The rivalries among the military brass were publicly known. If the Military Intelligence Service (SIM) nabbed a revolutionary, it did not inform BRAC in order to earn merits in the eyes of the Dictator.

Batista's gang of thugs relied upon blackmail, brutal repression and the notorious *chivato* (stoolpigeon) for doing their "work". The *Batistianos* also used to their advantage the inner rivalries of the rightwing opposition groups such as the Authentic Organization and the Triple A.

The deaths of Pelayo Cuervo and Agostini and the seizure of arms in the home of revolutionary Paquito Cairol were due to tips from members of rightwing organizations.

*Chivatos* were recruited from among traitors to the Revolution who out of cowardice or personal problems placed themselves at the service of the dictatorship. Another source of *chivatos* was the beneficiaries of phoney but wellpaying jobs on the government payroll, many of whom were pressed into providing information.

The dictatorship found strong support in "lumpen" elements. Stoolpigeon Manolo Relojero ran a prostitution network and a "lowlife bar" in Guanabacoa. Relojero used the prostitutes and the hangers on at the bar, to obtain information from younger inexperienced revolutionaries.

Relojero was executed by the July 26 Movement in the midst of the fight against the dictatorship.

## AGENTS ARE NEEDED

The people who took the numbers racket bets, the marijuana pushers, the political wheeler dealers and similar elements comprised the information network of the dictatorship.

When the "law enforcement" bodies caugh a thief, with a radio, say, they beat him up and a few hours later let him go after reaching an "agreement" enabling the thief to continue to steal, so long as his victims were not important. In the agreement with the police officer, the thief would hand over a share and also engage in the quest for information: it was the birth of a stoolpigeon.

Police officers and gangster or prostitution bigwigs divided up their zones of operation. No chief could impinge upon the zone of another. The police officers received sizable shares of those operations.

## THE FIRST THIEVES OF THE COUNTRY

A typical case is one that happened in 1957. That year an old Navy captain had his wallet stolen in the territory of the gangster known as El Cayuco. The old skipper had over a thousand pesos in his wallet.

Distraught by his loss, the Navy officer called the Bureau and they located El Cayuco and explained the situation: "You have to give back the money, the old man's raising a ruckus" said the Bureau people.

El Cayuco met with his gang and detailed the situation. Three hours later the Navy officer had his money in his pocket ... and nothing more was seen of the thief.

Every two or three weeks, to keep up appearances, noisy raids were conducted against prostitutes and unorganized thieves.

The capitalist press reported in large type on these operations of "cleanup against antisocial elements that disturb the social order."

The Cubans used to say: "The number one thieves in this country wear uniforms."

## INFILTRATION

The struggle against espionage and informers is not new for revolutionaries throughout the world. Lenin's closest associates described him as "skilled in going unnoticed among the enemies and discovering the agents of the czar."

The Cuban revolutionaries learned early on the cost of betrayal and the stoolpigeon's information. But they also learned to work within the repressive bodies. They learned the work of INFILTRATION which is basic for intelligence and counterintelligence.

The work of infiltration makes it possible to obtain first hand information on enemy activities. An agent infiltrated in the adversary's forces can do more damage than the offensive of an armored corps or an airraid.

The infiltrated agent knows about all the elements that the adversary possesses, his strong and weak points, resources and methods of work.

## THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE UNDERGROUND

Jesús Padrón has a slow, painful walk: he was infiltrated in the Bureau of Investigations. In his department he often found out the time and place that the Bureau would make an arrest or arms seizure.

When he heard about those repressive movements, Padrón headed for the site of the operation and warned the revolutionaries.

On February 24, 1955 Padrón was discovered at a secret meeting of underground activists. The cars of the Military Intelligence Service stopped outside the site of the meeting. In order to flee the Batista agents, Padrón leapt to the rooftop of the house next door.

"I didn't make it and fell two stories. When I hit bottom I felt as if I were landing on a huge hotwater bottle. The SIM agents

caught me easily because I had two broken ankles and couldn't move" says Padrón today, who displays on the collar of his shirt his insignia as a first lieutenant of State Security.

Mario Enrique Laverde was infiltrated by the Popular Socialist Party within the Batista repressive apparatus. "At first all I did was wash floors but little by little I managed to work at the telephone switchboard and was able to obtain information." Laverde today is an officer of the revolutionary Security.

## EYES OF A CAT

The origins of the revolutionary counterintelligence of Cuba must be sought before the January victory.

An old man with strong muscles and an energetic way of speaking is fond of saying: "Security is built with the persecuted of all times, the underground fighters of all times, the fighters of all times."

He works secretly within the ranks of counterintelligence and is called José C. "We came into existence beaten by the billyclubs of the BRAC and by hunger; our eyes became used to the darkness of clandestine life. Now the counterrevolutionaries can't hide because our eyes are those of a cat."

The first time that the existence of a revolutionary counterintelligence agency became public was in 1959.

Fidel Castro explained in a televised speech that a large scale counterrevolutionary conspiracy by the late Dominican dictator Trujillo and a group of land owners affected by the recently enacted agrarian reform law had been dismantled.

Fidel Castro praised the "fine work of the G-2 infiltrated within the conspirators". Months before that operation against the reactionaries, a group of men of the revolution worked intensely in the creation of the agency.

## SECRET HISTORY

But the history of the revolutionary Security agency is a secret one. The CIA would like to know how the DSE was set up and its current structure.

Once the Revolution achieved victory the people jubilantly hailed the destruction of the regime army and its repressive bodies. In order to fight imperialist aggressions and defend their newly won rights millions of people joined the new armies of the revolution and also its *secret arm*.

Today the Cuban people have two armies of silence to detect and destroy the attempts of enemy intelligence, the CIM (Military Counterintelligence) and the Department of State Security. That is all that the Central Intelligence Agency knows.

## OPERATIONAL WORK

Operational work is what the members of the Department of State Security like best about their job.

It is in operational work that they penetrate and act within the enemy movements. There are operational jobs that take months or years while others take only days.

A sample or "short" operational work was DSE's effort against bandit Pitti Hernández.

## A MYSTERIOUS MAN COOLS OFF IN THE AFTERNOON

The Las Villas province Security section detected through its agents in the Escambray that Hernández had fled to Havana.

At the same time Security officer Felipe García received a report from a Defense Committee in the Apolo district dealing with the "suspicious movements of a new individual in the neigborhood, no one knows where he came from and he never goes out".

Along with those reports officer Felipe García received a request from Las Villas:

"If Pitti Hernández is captured at once we will be able through his declarations to locate the most recent zones of movement of the band of Luis Vargas and other groups.

"He should be captured quietly so that the news does not reach the ears of the counterrevolution and the bands change their zones of movement."

The first step for officer Felipe García and his work team was to verify if the "individual with the suspicious movements in the Apolo district" was the fugitive Hernández. That could be the case, but were it not, other suspects would be investigated.

Operational work on Pitty Hernández began.

In a blue and white Dodge Felipe García and another agent went to the quiet Havana neighborhood. The car stopped about 50 meters from the house and the agents headed for a grocery store on the corner.

In the porch of the hideout a man was taking the afternoon breeze, seated comfortably in a rocking chair.

The agents took pictures of the man using cameras with telescopic sights. A slightly stooped woman looked at the outsiders, but did not see the cameras. Then she bought her groceries.

Several hours later the developed pictures were sent to Las Villas, which replied with an urgent message: "The man in the rocker is Pitti Hernández."

## THE THREAD

All that remained was to prepare a "direct capture plan". Constant surveillance was mantained of Pitti's hideout.

The result showed that Héctor, Pitti's older brother, visited the house two or three times a day.

Following Héctor's trail he was found to work in a pharmaceutical laboratory on Rancho Boyeros avenue, and he was seeking a way to get Pitti out of the country secretly.

"Héctor is going to be an important element in our work" Felipe García told the members of his operational group.

"I think that Héctor can be the thread for the quiet capture of Pitti" he said.

In the small, airconditioned office the agents heard the details of the plan. On their desks were guns of different calibres, especially 9 mm Brownings. Behind was a bookshelf and against it leaned two long FA rifles and an M-52 Czech light machinegun and a US made M-1 carbine, but those weapons were not used later on.

## HÉCTOR HERNÁNDEZ, YOU ARE UNDER ARREST BY SECURITY

Héctor did not notice the white and blue car that followed him because of the heavy rainfall that afternoon. He had finished his shift in the laboratory and was returning to Pitti's hideout.

Inside the white and blue Dodge officer Felipe García told an agent seated beside him: "That is Héctor." Agent Jorge González, with glasses, slender and in his late twenties, looked through the movement of the windshield wiper at the misty form of Héctor who sought protection from the rain.

"Do you know what to do?"

"Yes" said González.

"Okay, now!" said the officer and speeded up slightly until the car drew up alongside Héctor. González opened the door and calmly got out.

He was beside Héctor in two strides and cast an arm over his broad shoulders. "Hello, old buddy!" he said out loud. At once, before Héctor could say a word, he whispered into his ear: "Héctor Hernández, you are under arrest by Security, don't say a word and get into that car."

Héctor still didn't realize what was going on, and he obediently got into the car. "But, who are you people?" he asked. González showed him an ID card with green borders.

Héctor read the initials on the ID card: D-S-E. Meanwhile, in his hideout, Pitti Hernández thought, "I'm a man that can't be stopped. When I say that's the way it is, that's the way it is..."

## AKA COINCIDENCE

In the airconditioned office, the members of the operations group led by officer Felipe García heard the details of the quiet arrest of Pitti Hernández.

In the DSE reports the custom is to write aliases as follows: "Luis Santana Gallardo *aka* Luis Vargas." The initials stand for *also known as*... The security agents came up with an *aka* for officer Felipe García: they called him "*aka* coincidence". That name was no coincidence. Felipe García and his men used to brag about their "accidental" captures.

"Héctor will be the thread. Look at my plan..."

## AFTER A GLASS OF WATER

"Héctor, your brother's fate depends on the aid you give us."

"Really, I don't know a thing about my brother. I don't know where he is."

"Listen Héctor, if he resists, he'll be killed in the shootout. He's a real goner."

"Sure, I understand, I just don't know where he is."

The officer stared into Héctor's eyes and then reached for a yellow envelope which he opened carefully. The cardboard made a sound. Héctor carefully observed the movements of the Security officer, who took care that the envelope wouldn't tear.

Felipe García took several photographs from the yellow envelope and spread them on the table as if they were cards.

Héctor grew pale.

"This is Pitti" Felipe García said, pointing to one of the pictures "and here he is again".

Héctor stammerd a few words. Sweat bathed his face; he would have liked to run away, but Pitti, in front of him, calmly rocked in his chair. "Yes, what can I do for you?" Then Héctor asked for a glass of water and calmed down. Then he said:

"He got into bad company. My father was very worried, until we just stopped hearing from Pitti. He was up in the mountains with the bandits. I heard the news and went to our town, Cartagena, to tell my folks. They were very unhappy.

"I know Pitti isn't bad, he's just a wrongheaded kid. So when my folks called me again, two years after he joined the bandits, I headed for Cartagena again. The folks said that Pitty had escaped from the band, that he had had problems with Luis Vargas and was in hiding and wanted me to get him out of the country.

"He's my brother, that's why I brought him to the home of some friends, they aren't communists either, like you people say, they're *gusanos* (trans: literally, worms: counterrevolutionaries).

"That's Pitti's story, the story of a wrongheaded guy who's hiding from the bandits and from you people.

"Now tell me, how can I save Pitti?"

## THIS IS THE PLAN

"This is the plan" officer Felipe García told him. "Pay close attention, Héctor. You're going to tell your brother that you've known me for some time, that I'm a doctor, let's say my name is Terraeche, that's it, Terraeche. Got it? Well, you're also to tell him that you convinced me to take you along in a yacht that I got. Any doubts? Let's continue then; he gets into the car with us, it's a two door car and he'll be sitting in back. He'll be captured already but no one will realize, is that clear? Then we head for security... From then on, his life is guaranteed."

"He won't be shot?" asked Héctor.

"He still hasn't killed anybody."

## BANDIT ON ROUTE TO STATE SECURITY

A few hours later a blue and white two door Dodge stopped outside Pitti's hideout. A sun like molten steel hung over the quiet neighborhood. Three men got out of the car, Héctor, Officer Felipe García and a young man wearing a colorful sports shirt.

The three men seemed excited because they were coming to pick up Pitti. People were playing dominos on the porch but Pitti was not among them: he was sleeping in the last room.

A round-shouldered woman spoke with the visitors: "Pitti is in back" she said to Héctor. The woman thought she knew Felipe García. "Where have we met before?" Héctor heard her ask as he walked to the last room to look for his brother.

"I don't know" said Felipe García and at once recognized the woman from the grocery store.

"Where have I met you before? My goodness, my memory's just awful!"

"Lots of people look like each other..." (the touch of the Browning under his shirt made him feel better).

"Yes, that's true" said the woman.

In a few minutes everything was ready. Héctor introduced the "travelling companions". Pitti happily shook hands with Felipe García. Then they called the woman to one side and said "Tomorrow at this time Pitti will be riding around Miami."

The woman smiled: "Well Doctor, take care of him there."

When the car left the quiet Apolo district it turned left and after ten minutes the four men were caught up in the city traffic. The buildings flew by on either side of the windows.

The security officer said as he looked for Pitti's face in the rear-view mirror:

"Today that's the end of Havana, that's the end of the G-2!"

"G-2, G-2," meditated Pitti out loud. "Finally, G-2 couldn't get me."

Then he rested on the comfortable seat.

"So that's what you think of G-2?" asked officer Felipe García, and Pitti didn't like the question at all.

# ROADOPENER

*Cuba*, September 1968

For a week I have travelled over two thousand kilometers of roads. However my hosts were annoyed when I decided to put an end to the journey. They said I had "just begun my trip and had not seen a thing." To me, it was quite the opposite: I was tired of fording rivers or crossing them on rafts or in our GAZ jeep, I was tired of riding along the edge of precipices in the Sierra Maestra and the Sierra del Toa; I dozed off in the endless rice fields of the Cauto Valley and the cane areas in the northern and central parts of the Eastern region.

The situation was as follows: seated alongside me, the driver we nicknamed *Mandril* and whose real name we forgot. In back, the photographer Nicolas and Mister R. Murt, aide of the highway construction department of Oriente province. Murt was the one who grew annoyed:

"How are we going to stop the trip? There's still a lot to see. So fast, the way you people want, you can't do anything."

The idea of the road people is to crisscross Cuba's largest province with about 50 new highways and roads that are to be finished in 1970 and will be used to collect farm products, even those grown in the most remote spots, and they will also considerably improve the social conditions of those lonely areas.

The people who live on the south coast of the Sierra Maestra have a curious custom: they like to show off their cemeteries. There are many of them along the coast. They are small, uneven, although some of them are painted white and have flower beds, but there are certainly a lot of them, and that is where mountain people of any age, killed by any disease, were buried. Look at those rusty, rotted crosses. EPD (*en paz descanse:* rest in peace) Eduardo Ochoa, 3/3/53. EPD José Lora, died on July 16, 1956. Look at those empty fruit jars used as vases, with their wilted flowers of the years, look at those mounds and the fallen gravestones and note that there is no cross older than 1950 because they were made of wood or cheap iron or there was neither time nor money for anything else. Just leave the dead person there, in one of those cemeteries, and curse the lack of a boat on the sea or the skipper who failed to see the desperate signalling with rags and sheets, while Eduardo Ochoa or José Lora died, unaided...

Alcibiades Jasper, 24. I'm from this south coast, from Aserradero. I started working in the road department in 1963. That was five years ago. Back then the road was already a year old. Here I drive a KP-3. I like it because it's strong. Sure, I'm a mountain man. Yes, I'm married, but I split up with my wife. I have one child and another about to be born. The house is about 300 yards from the road. Before there was no road, that's a fact, not at all.

...because there was no way of reaching the hospital in Santiago de Cuba, or getting that little bulb of penicillin, no way of reaching the boat that lazily, blindly sailed away.

Those mountain people, used to death, protected Fidel Castro's guerrillas and fought alongside them. As soon as the Revolution won, work began on opening roads, building asphalt channels into the mountains, breaking down solitude, salvaging the mountains and their people from hatred and hunger. Now, those mountains are fierce. There isn't a single easy yard, not even an inch that hasn't had to feel the tons of dynamite and the might of 10 bulldozers.

Now Santiago de Cuba is closer. Carnival is in full swing there now. We have hospitals and carnivals. Now, let me tell you something. You use dynamite, dynamite is rough, blasting, a real blaster,

and the mountains explode. Then comes the bulldozer and sweeps along the mountains' flesh, and the bulldozer is very hard. Then you see, it's like I say, you do all that so people can get the bananas and the coffee and the taro to market, all those crops that are really soft. See what I mean? The way the hard things get together with the soft things?

At the time of the victory of the Revolution, Oriente had just 36 highways and roads, almost all in very bad condition so that they needed to be completely repaired in some cases. Without stopping, the road plan built 67 new roads in eight years to link up the most difficult places and in the next two years, the plan is to put down 66 new roads, that is, 1 843 kilometers more of new roads.

I tell you, ladies and gentlemen, take your hats off to those rum-drinking, womanizing men of the road who break the mountain wide open as if human hide had the same resistance as concrete.

They have come from Oriente, from this province. There are 7 800 men and they are the makers of the road plan. The new blood was injected by the Communist Youth and the men who were discharged from military service. These new people are trained in special schools and the best students then become teachers. The courses: bulldozers, haulers, blasters, drivers, pneumatic drills, topography. Today there are 305 students in the schools and 272 previous graduates.

My name is Juan García, 25. I graduated as a bulldozer operator five months ago. I finished fifth grade and climbed Peak Turquino nine times. I teach classes in theory at night and practical classes in the afternoon. I used to work on a state farm and the Young Communists chose me to become a bulldozer operator. I was pleased because I used to hoe and now I drive a bulldozer. It's a big change.

My name is Lorenzo Carrillo, 23. I'm a student of Juan's. I like to study with him because he gives me lots of time up on the machine. It's true I don't do too well in the theoretical part, but then I get up on the machine and that's different. If anything's wrong, I know where it is. Something inside tells me. I get down and go over it, and I see I was right about what was wrong.

But they're still far from being like the old man. These two young operators will have to break through lots of heavy terrain and break lots of tractors and leave lots of sweat along the way to get to speak in that calm way, with the same kind of certainty and nostalgia as...

Francisco García, 64. I've been in roads from 50 years. Since I was 14. I've built in Manati, in Ranchuelo, in Cayo Mambi, that's where I got malaria, and on the Central Highway. Lots of the roads I built don't even exist any more. The bridges from Bayamo to Buenaventura are still there. I built them.

...Francisco García is head of brigade 23. That brigade reduced the time between Santiago de Cuba and Chivirico. Before the Revolution: 12 hours sailing. A year ago: five hours in the passenger trucks of the Mountain Transport System. Now: an hour and a half in the buses that run, perhaps too fast, along a smooth, blue asphalt road.

Another veteran is Camagüey, whose real name is Onelio Manso, 48, 26 years in construction.

This is the first tunnel built by Cubans all on our own. Without anyone's help. It's 215 meters long, 10 wide and eight high. We blasted it through living rock. The village of Songo is on top of the tunnel. The whole village felt the dynamite blasts.

And Camagüey shows us the tunnel.
And then Camagüey talks about "the hardest part."

The hardest part is the work with the Soviet pneumatic drills. Each one weighs 110 pounds without the barrier and not counting the kicking it does. You can't work on those hammers more than 10 hours a day, but here the boys are doing as much as 13 hours, every day, every single day.

Camagüey is in the canteen of the Songo tunnel brigade. Behind him is a jukebox filled with out-of-date tunes. A few weeks ago, the day they nationalized the private businesses in the area, they took the jukebox from a bar and now they have it in the canteen "to relax a bit at lunch and dinner time."

I'm José Pintado Pérez, 51 years old, 30 in construction. Besides being José Pintado, I'm chief of brigade 43. We're building the Imías-Duaba Arriba road, 325 men. We began on November 1, 1967. We're supposed to reach Duaba Arriba in 1970. Two years of work. Moving up from the south coast to the center of the mountains. Shooting off mouthfuls of dynamite, moving millions of cubic meters of earth. Look how rough that terrain is, how broken it is. If it had been on the flatland, the highway would have been built already. In the mountains you have to advance with your soul. Here we're afraid of the rivers, the rains that sweep away the work of months.

A brigade of 100 or 150 men has been organized to build each road. Brigade 43 is an exceptional brigade. All the brigade members live in camps, on the sites. There are some camps with good living conditions, they have television, mosquito netting and running water. Others are not so lucky. The camp of brigade 43 is one of the best. Yet, Camilo Noa, the local political instructor, says:

"In a place with so many men in such tough conditions, the worst problem was a fistfight between two workers as the result of a practical joke. The Labor Council called them in, sanctioned them and today they're good friends."

I didn't like the answer. "Just a fistfight" says the instructor and let's say that's the way it is, in brigade 43. But in those barracks, at the access to the road that is coming into existence, there is a world of men who are far from home, who are punished by the sun and 100 varieties of mosquitoes.

I'm José Ramón Lima, 42, with 21 years as a builder. I'm the provincial road director. Sure, we have problems, you can't imagine how many, to be able to build these roads... and naturally, no fooling, so that the difficulties get solved...we build the roads. We're short on tires for the machinery and spare parts. Especially the Barreiros. There's a shortage of food supplies for the workers...no, there isn't a lot of food, really. But we have no problems with fuel, we never have to stop work because of fuel...but of course, fuel isn't the whole story. We need shoes, food...and spare parts...

There are 42 barracks for the brigades and almost all of them have electricity. The workers receive, free of charge, housing, food, transportation, shoes, clothing and medical care. Each group works 10 hour shifts in two teams. In all the brigades there are libraries, with the stress on political literature. In sports there is baseball, pingpong and domino, but there is little equipment or free time. In addition to the technical schools there are elementary schools.

A mule driver, a real one, with his team of mules, running along as if they were a 10-wheel Zil truck, on the Moa-Baracoa road.

"Sure, what can I do for you? Only make it snappy, so the team doesn't get away from me."

Name: Roberto Cobos.
Age: 46.

Experience as a team driver: 20 years battling with the mules.

There are five of them, Cimarrón (Runaway), the guide mule, Bachata (Party), Gimonte, Rosita and Lucero.

Load: Coffee and starchy vegetables.

Route: Before I used to as far as San Ignacio. The road gets shorter, thanks to the new highway. I want a truck, though. And I'll give it a name, just like the mules. Sure, I plan to call it Clavelín (Carnation) the truck.

Say something important.

"Before, we used to have to take sick people out in slings. Some people died in those slings. It used to take me three hours on the road, now it's half an hour. The road's pretty good...pretty special. Couldn't ask for more...you know, if I get the truck, you figure Lucero'll get mad?"

Yes.

"Well, then I'll just take Lucero along with me in the truck, in the cabin."

The mule driver took off at a gallop to catch up to his team. Our jeep continues in the opposite direction, to where the blasters have just changed the mountain geography with a charge of three quarters of a ton of dynamite.

DYNAMITER: Manuel Sánchez Oliveras, 34. Since 1952 he has worked in construction. "I took an eight month course in the school at El Cristo, where I learned my job. I'm head of the dynamite team of brigade 43. Before I used to be a mason. The official name of my profession is 'civilian blaster.' I work with 10 men. You have to have good eyesight, be quick on your feet and calm to be a dynamiter."

But Manuel Sánchez in fact is a bundle of well-controlled nerves that show in his skilled, uneasy fingers.

"Today I blasted off 25 cases of dynamite" says Manuel.

There are 24 road brigades that have up-to-date equipment comprised of six bulldozers, two levellers, two rollers, two compressors, two loaders, 10 dump trucks, ą greasing plant, a mobile workshop, a jeep, a soldering rig, an electric plant, a concrete mixer, two plank trucks and a water tank truck.

"Today I blasted off 25 cases of dynamite" says Manuel. "And there's a whole lot still to go. I guess I'll be spending my life blasting off cases of dynamite, until we finish off Oriente, leave it like a park in downtown Havana, where people come to walk around and see the cane and the mangos and the taro planted over on the side, all the time."

Another job the road people have is to build "farm roads" generally between the rice terraces, and in the cane zones, to secure good transport among the canefields. Also, for them, there is the urgent task of building five air strips for farm fumigation. There are three of them already finished, they are just waiting for the planes to land.

Melba Saborí, 26, is from Palma Soriano and she is the manager of brigade 21. She is the first woman manager in the Road Plan. Her husband works in the same brigade. He is in charge of earth

movement. They have no children and see each other "more or less" every 11 days. Melba completed junior high school. "I work 12 to 14 hours a day. I'm in charge of 117 workers and 16 students in the equipment operators school. I handle six thousand pesos a fortnight. My husband gives me a hand because he once worked as a manager."

Mandril, our driver, loves to rev up the engine of his jeep on the new roads. The one we're running along now will soon be a highway. It is the road from Las Tunas to Bayamo. All of a sudden the red danger sign looms up in front of the windshield. Mandril stops. The Cauto River has brought us to a stop and we have to go around it along a little wooden bridge that links the spot with the nearest shore on the other side. Beside the bridge, without fear of distance, the road workers build a concrete and steel rod bridge, a large and lovely one, 224 meters long and 50 high. Nicolás the photographer gets out with his camera and is gone for half an hour. He is covered with sweat and has run out of film. He lingers lovingly looking at the bridge and says: "You know what that means? The people who build these things are more revolutionary...they feel the Revolution, they feel it in concrete, in asphalt...

I look at him, I rumple his hair, I smile at him as if I were a political commissar and I say: "Okay, don't talk any more and let's go, we'll be late for lunch" but Nicolás isn't through and he says:

"In the biggest construction projects, the ideological level of the workers is higher than elsewhere."

"Shit, Nicolás" I reply "that was one real nice sentence, you'll never come up with another one to match it in your life."

# A MAN OF THE MANGROVES

*Hoy Domingo*, November 29, 1964

Angel never imagined what he would see that early morning, much less that he would witness an event of incalculable magnitude.

The date: December 2, 1958. As he did very early every morning, the tough charcoal maker got up and drank a tinful of coffee. He left his shack behind him and began to move through the mangrove swamps. About 500 meters from the sea was the charcoal furnace he was putting up.The sun began to fill the atmosphere and expel the breeze. The furnace filled Angel's mind at that time, he had to do a good job, so he would get a good harvest out of it, as if it were a crop...

I had finished the furnace when I looked up between the mangroves, they were very tall then and very thick and I saw a tall, white man. I looked at him and figured he was an American. "Now what would an American be doing around here at this time?" I wondered and moved up to a couple of yards from him and when I got up real close, he pulls out a real little machinegun and says "Halt right there!" and then he cocked it and says to me "Hold there, walk straight ahead!"

Later on I figured he wasn't American at all but one of the bandits who had escaped from the Manzanillo prison and I say to him

"don't worry, don't be scared, I'm a decent guy." He looked at me and explained: "Don't you be scared, your life is safe, just walk where I say."

Naturally I did what he said and followed him (later on I found out that the redfaced white guy was Comandante Luis Crespo). We walked on and reached a clearing and I saw about 100 armed men sitting right there in the mud. The white guy takes me over to a tall man and he says: "Look, chief, I found this country guy here." The tall man got up and shook hands with me and says: "Come on, sit down, I'm Fidel Castro I come to liberate Cuba."

Angel's charcoal maker's spread was all mangrove, thick, clinging to the mud and sometimes it won't let even breath get by. There is no high ground, but if there were, and no matter how high it could have been, the Sierra Maestra would never be visible from there. Now, in almost all spots in Oriente you can see the Sierra, but from the mangroves at Las Coloradas you can't see the mountains. Just mangroves, thickly interwoven.

After I sat down beside the man who was Fidel Castro, he began to asked me questions. "What have you got at home?" I said my wife and my three children, so he said: "No, I mean what have you got to eat." I said a pig and some bananas. The people there got up and said: "Right, bananas, sure, bananas and pork." Then he asked me if Belic was far away and if there were trucks there and if the Sierra Maestra was very far away. I said yes to all his questions.

When a mountain person says that something is pretty close or just a cock's crow away, you know you've got quite a trip ahead of you. But if you ask the same mountain person for some other place and he rubs his beard, clears his throat and then says "yes, well, that is a bit out of the way" then you know you've got at least 50 kilometers ahead of you.

In those days I had opened up a little path to my house. It was Providence itself that told me to open up that path, otherwise they would never have been able to get out. I took them to my place

and they drank water from the well, they looked like a flock of pigeons falling on the water. I knocked down some coconuts for them and gave them some sweet potatoes. They said they hadn't drunk any fresh water in a whole week.

Then I grabbed the pig to get it ready, but when I had it by the ears, they began to shell the *Granma* and Fidel stood up and said: "Let the pig go! Clean your guns, *compañeros,* we're leaving!"

The word guerrilla has a special sound, there is something about it that sounds sweet and special. In French and Russian they say partisan.

In English they use the same word, but with a different sound, guerrilla. But it never sounds as fine as it does in Spanish, especially when it is pronounced softly in a thick mountain wood, in the nights on the mountain or in the thick mangroves: guerrilla, guerrilla...it sounds like the steps of mysterious columns, with rifle and knapsack slung over shoulders.

After the shelling the plane started to fly by very low and my wife went outside. The next day when the soldiers came and asked if she was the woman dressed in red and she said yes and then they asked her if she had given Fidel Castro something to eat and she said yes, just as she would have fed the soldiers too if they asked her. Then the plane flew off and then Fidel's men left too but after a while two of them came back to get me and they said "The chief wants you." I went with them and asked him what he wanted and he said: "Come with us to set us on our way."

I went ahead of the group, Fidel was behind me and since I wasn't armed, I said I was unprotected and he said: "Don't worry, if the soldiers show up, you get behind me and nothing will happen to you."

Then I asked him where he wanted to go, to Belic or to the mountains, and he said: "To the mountains."

Ángel Castellanos is the full name of the first man who saw the expeditionaries. Bernarda Cañada is his wife and the first woman to see them. They no longer live in the shack in the mangrove swamp, now they live in Belic in a cement house with a tile floor,

a cool tile floor that makes you want to lie down and sleep on it when it's very hot. In the living room there is a large picture of Fidel and one of Yuri Gagarin. There are also pictures of the children and a separate one of the oldest daughter, with her long black hair. When Ángel gets up in the morning he washes his face under the faucet in the yard, not inside the house. He likes to feel the cool water, out of doors.

Fidel looked different then. He didn't have a beard and was really stocky and rosy. He had such a big knapsack he could hardly carry it. He had a rifle with a sighting device and a pistol in his belt.

When Bernarda speaks of those days she says: "If Fidel hadn't landed here, what would our lives have been like, Ángel?" And Ángel is still for a moment, he lifts up his shirt and shows a seven-shaped scar, and says: "When Fidel landed I had a hernia, the crabs and the bugs would have finished off the whole family. When the revolution won, I had an operation and went to work on the aqueduct of the state farm. But even with my hernia, I fought hard on my little plot! I harvested sweet potatoes in the mud and made charcoal with the water around my waist."

After we did a good stretch, Fidel said to me: "Now go back and if you can, cook something and bring me the food on horseback, if you can." But I couldn't do it, because when I got home the shelling and the bombing were going on and I had to hide the horse and leave the furnace lit all day until it went out by itself. Then I left and hid with my wife and kids. The war was on, and we weren't at all ready for it!"

The water there is muddy, at times it is black and at times greenish, the only living things seem to be gnats that bite you all over and tiny crabs that run, jump, leap from behind the trees and from the earth in droves. The *Granma* tied up there, a few kilometers from a wide beach. The monuments to the history of the revolution are like that, simple, rustic. They are frequently made of palm bark like Ángel's house, the first place the expeditionaries visited and which was burned by the army.

The beach at Las Coloradas is right there, next to the mangrove. It seems that the darkness kept them from seeing. If they had landed at the beach they wouldn't have had any problems or they could have landed at Belic itself, after all, there weren't many soldiers and they would have caught them off guard.

But later on they told me that a launch sighted them and headed back so that they were in a hurry to land. But really, they had a tough time of it, because otherwise you wouldn't be calling this a Revolution.

Then I left Fidel and a few seconds before the bombing, I saw that two of them were leaning against a tree and cleaned their guns and when they saw me they ran off and I called to them: "No, I'm a good guy, see how Fidel Castro headed that way!" And I showed them the way, then I saw two more who asked me for a smoke and among the three of us, I divided up a pack and I gave them a knapsack and two rifles that had been left behind in my shack.

Then I didn't see them again until...

A week of storms in the Gulf in a small craft. Almost without water and food. They arrive at land but there is no such thing, just mud and gnats and crabs and mangrove swamp. Many of them leave their mangled boots and continue barefoot. ("Fidel came out of the mangrove with his boots in a real mess" says Ángel). The Sierra is nowhere to be seen. Finally a local man gives them food and some very necessary human warmth and when they are about to cook some food, the first plane shows up and they have to leave the place. We do not ask them how they managed with all that, one adversity after another, day after day, let us ask, where did you get the strength to head for the Sierra, if you couldn't see the mountains anywhere? How could they think of battle much less victory if there were just 82 of them, badly armed, with the Catalinas and the B-26's flying overhead, and facing soldiers with hundreds of Garands?

It is easy to answer by invoking lofty ideals or blind faith in the struggle. But when you're hungry, when your feet and your back are killing you, when your hands and your mouth are full of mud,

your eyes filled with saltwater, your clothing soaked, the heat, bombings, thirst, mud, all of it getting worse, it is very hard for your mind to find time for ideals or for faith.

Where did they get their strength?

But time the months went by and I didn't see them any more. I was hidden from the guards for a long time, they used to look for me at my place every night, after that I went to join them and one day I got to a camp and found Faustino Pérez who had a huge beard, he looked at me and asked: "Aren't you the one from Las Coloradas?" I said that it was me, then he gave me a hug and his plate of rice and beans with some taro and said: "Hey, man, eat up, eat..." I sure did eat, with pleasure and I felt bad when I remembered the day they landed and I couldn't even cook them some pork.

When I finished he took me to a hill where the radio station was; Fidel was on his way down and when we got close, Faustino says to him, Look who's here, I bet you don't remember him. Fidel took a good look at me and then he hugged me. He sure did recognize me and I know he was happy to see me. He showed that because he patted me on the back and said, Am I glad to see you!

Yes Sirree, that's just what he said.

# INTERVIEW WITH A KILLER

*Granma*, Sunday. March 13, 1966

Just a month ago I found myself in a large room with renaissance style furniture, stuffed chairs upholstered in leather. It was part of the Department of State Security.

Two men came through a door to my left. One of them was wearing a military uniform with a pistol. The other wore the yellow uniform of the prisoners. The shortsleeved jacket came halfway up his chest.

When they entered I looked instinctively at the hands of the man in yellow. They were boney hands with scaly skin. On the back of his hands were veins that mapped out irregular courses as if they were the tributaries of a stagnant, greenish, dead river.

Then I looked at the rest of him: his was slender with an unkempt beard growing from his chin, his messy hair could have been made of wire and above all, his two nervous hands, sometimes linked on his legs, at times stupidly fingering the edges of his pants.

R, the Security officer, sat down at my left and the interview began. "Aragón, you can take a seat." Aragón sat down in a broad armchair opposite me.

"Yes, sir" said Aragón.

"Aragón, this *compañero* is a journalist from *Granma*, he wants to ask you some questions."

"Sure, fine, sir" said Aragón.

"Then you're ready?" asked officer R.

"Yes, sir."

## A CORRECT TACTIC

A high ranking officer of LCB (the Struggle against Bandits) Commander Víctor Dreke, organized the operation of encirclement and combing to capture the band of ringleader Estervino Gutiérrez.

The date of the operation was set for March 1964. On D-day, at six in the morning, zone M awoke to find itself surrounded by two LCB battalions.

Lieutenant Pedro Nodal was the commander of battalion number two. He was ordered to advance in combing formation within the encirclement. The zone to be "cleaned" was a wooded, rough terrain. Lieutenant Nodal received his orders. A few minutes later the battalion found some gear in a clearing in the woods: 10 backpacks, and a kettle filled with beans in boiling water. The wood was still lighted with blue flames under the black bottom of the kettle.

Nodal, a good shot with his automatic Belgian rifle, was also perfectly familiar with the movements of the bandits: he was a founding member of LCB.

They had just run away and Nodal figured they wouldn't leave the woods. Taking advantage of the situation provided by the terrain they would dig it as they pleased and have surprise on their side. In addition the thick woods would prevent an effective maneuver with the battalion.

The young officer decided to pound the bandits' probable position with rocket fire. The tactic was the right one: just two shots sufficed to get the ten members of the band out of the woods, fast.

## LUCKY BANDITS

Although they had been ousted from their positions the bandits were lucky: on their way out they made it to a hill and once again dug in on its crest. Once again they had the upper hand: they could fire downward and at an open field. And the LCB fighters had to advance across that field.

The maneuver of the bandits was clear: they would shoot from cover at the "comb" and once a breech was opened, they would slip through it. "Go over the top" is the way a soldier would put it. In view of the new situation, Nodal ordered the combing to stop. "You there, stand around me!" he ordered five men with rifles. Nodal himself put down his FAL and loaded himself with hand grenades.

The small combat formation began to advance, the five rifle bearers surrounding Nodal.

With their guns firing the whole time, they created a protective barrier. From the center of the group Nodal tossed hand grenades at the bandits.

Those were terrible moments. Just five meters from the hilltop the bandits ceased their fire. The smoke of the explosions lifted and the LCB fighters could see the dead and wounded bandits lying on top of each other.

A few steps away Estervino Gutiérrez, leader of the band, lay wounded in the back.

The bandits were surrounded by their up-to-date weapons: Thompson machineguns, M-3's, M-1 carbines, Garand rifles.

## "I WAS AFRAID, SIR"

The capture of Estervino Gutiérrez was not only a military victory. The chief of the band helped to clarify the events surrounding the death of Young Communist Roberto Gutiérrez.

A short time after his capture Estervino declared: "Yes, I was one of the killers of the Young Communist, but I wasn't the only one, because Clemente Aragón also pulled on the rope..."

And now Clemente Aragón, a recently captured bandit, moved nervously in his seat opposite me.

"Are you willing to answer my questions?" I asked.

"Yes, Sir" replied Aragón.

He lifted his head with each question. At first, I thought it was a haughty expression, then I realized he didn't have the courage for that. He lifted his head and cocked his ear. He took his time to reply.

"Clemente Aragón, why did you take up arms against the Revolution?" I asked, and as I did, thought that the question was naive. It may well be. Two years ago I interviewed other bandits and the first question was the same "Why did you take up arms against the Revolution?"

The bandit made a slight move in his large armchair. He lifted his head. "Against the Revolution, Sir?"

"Yes, that's what I said, Clemente Aragón."

"I was afraid, you know, afraid, Sir."

I looked the bandit straight in the eye. He held my gaze for a moment, then muttered: "I was afraid, Sir."

"What made you afraid, Clemente Aragón?"

"What was that, Sir? What was that, Sir?" he repeated.

I asked in a louder voice: "What were you afraid of?"

"What was I afraid of?" Aragón looked at the floor, searched for an answer in the lines of the tiles. He lifted his face. "They said the militiamen would kill me...I was afraid of that, Sir."

"Who told you that?"

"Juan Alberto's people, Sir."

"You mean Juan Alberto's bandits?" I asked.

"What was that, Sir? What did you say?" asked Aragón.

## UNDER FIRE FROM LCB

Arnoldo Martínez Andrades was chief of the counterrevolution in northern Las Villas. He took up arms against the Revolution on July 8, 1961 along with five other counterrevolutionaries. They were also from Río, a little village near Mayajigua. Their first "action" (40 days after taking up arms) was firing at the Community Social Club and the railroad in Río. That night seven people fell victim to the bandits.

Fifteen months went by: on October 1, 1962, at 6.30 in the afternoon, on La Ceniza farm, in the Caibarién municipality, Arnoldo Martínez and eight other bandits were wiped out an encirclement.

With Arnold's death, his brother Juan Alberto wanted to become a counterrevolutionary chief: he was already up in arms in the same zone.

A few months ago the Cuban exile radio stations mourned the death of Juan Alberto: his band, the last one in the northern zone, fell under the fire of LCB, the special force called Struggle against Bandits.

Estervino Gutiérrez and Clemente Aragón, killers of the Young Communist, belonged to Juan Alberto's band. Thanks to his "merits" Estervino was promoted by the counterrevolution and took over command of another band.

Clemente Aragón stayed with Juan Alberto. In zone Z Commander Lizardo Proenza smashed Juan Alberto's band with a quick operation.

From the center of a clump of tall grass Juan Alberto saw the LCB troops approach.

## FALL OF A BANDIT

Juan Alberto, armed with a baby Thompson, tried to break out of the circle in a desperate run. That was his technique: he always hid inside the encirclement and waited for the combing operation to pass right over him. Then he ran and left the troops behind him. The members of his band were still young and they moved around very quickly. But that day Juan Alberto tried to break the comb. Alongside him were running bandits Bartolo Labrada and Manuel Martínez.

Heavy fire became generalized.

A bullet from an M-52, Czechoslovak, struck the barrel of Juan Alberto's Thompson. It leapt out of the hands of the bandit. The small machinegun lay on the ground, out of commission. Then the bandit fell to his knees and said, grabbing his stomach: "They got me." Blood spurted forth and ran between his fingers. He said no more and pressed his face to the ground.

Bandit Manuel Martínez, who ran beside him, watched him die and then saw Bartolo Labrada, who called out as he fell: "They got me now!" as he spat out something red and thick.

After the operation the command discovered that three bandits were missing. A new pursuit was quickly organized but the three fugitives did not appear.

## DARING OPERATION

When the second LCB battalion, commanded by Lieutenant Pedro Nodal, annihilated in a daring operation the band of Estervino Gutiérrez, one of the killers of the Young Communist who disappeared on the night of September 7, 1963 fell into the hands of the revolutionary justice.

Estervino Gutiérrez declared that another bandit, Clemente Aragón, had also taken part in the killing.

Tried by the People's Tribunals, Estervino Gutiérrez received the death sentence.

But Clemente Aragón with two other bandits managed to escape from the LCB operation against ringleader Juan Alberto. Together with Clemente Aragón, escaped Rafael Labrada with the rank of "comandante", and Manuel Martínez.

The investigations were carried out: in order to escape, the three bandits ran 16 kilometers in an hour and a half. They managed to move from zone Z to zone C in a short time.

LCB sent some contingents in jeeps and trucks to follow them but they failed to locate them.

Hours later the officers of Struggle Against Bandits reviewed a map of the north coast of Las Villas and Camagüey. They figured that the three bandits had escaped but that they were there.

Just a few days went by. LCB and Security closely followed the last trail of the bandits. The blow fell firm and serene for the final sweep.

## A RING OF STEEL

In a short time the three bandits were surrounded. The LCB battalions wove a five kilometer human belt in zone C. With the dawn the combing inside the encirclement advanced.

At 10 in the morning several fighters noticed that two bandits were running at a distance of a kilometer. They could see their heads: two small points that at times slipped out of view. In the surrounded territory Guinea grass grew that reached the chest of the soldiers. Observation become difficult. Minutes later a fighter discovered another bandit running in the opposite direction.

The combing was electrified with the tension of the upcoming combat, but the bandits disappeared in the sea of guinea grass. They could no longer be seen. Lieutenant Sergio de Armas directed the combing. He carried a Soviet automatic pistol on automatic.

The men in the combing speeded up their pace towards the place where they last saw the bandits but they failed to catch them.

A soldier at that moment felt the earth move under his feet. "Stand up, you, stand up!" he shouted. The bandit responded from below with a blast of 45 bullets. Then he tried to stand to take up a better position.

He couldn't get up: the bullets kept him down on the ground.

A few moments later he was identified: Rafael Labrada (the *comandante*) was paying for his misdeeds. Only two bandits were left within the encirclement, just two in the whole northern zone.

As afternoon fell the battalions several times combed the five kilometers of encirclement. "The earth swallowed them up" said one soldier. The enemy group gave no signs of life in the entire day: only three abandoned backpacks turned up.

With the new day the command tried out another tactic.

The encircled terrain was uneven, wavy, like north-south waves. They had already combed in that same direction before.

The new combing would take place in the opposite direction, from south to north.

If the bandits were hidden under the "crest of the waves", they would be uncovered.

At the same time they would use what the LCB people call a "proletarian comb", that is, the fighters moving elbow to elbow, without any space between them.

## REVOLUTIONARY GENEROSITY

The new day's operation began and the results were quick.

At 8.30 the soldiers discovered two feet "under a crest." Also sticking out was a Dominican-made San Cristóbal carbine.

"Come out bandit, come out."

"Don't shoot" he pleaded.

"Come out, bandit" repeated the fighter and cocked his M-52 rifle.

"Don't shoot" gaid the bandit. "I'm coming out, don't shoot."

The bandit stood up. His face was in complete disarray. On his shoulders he bore epaulettes with bits of tin resembling the three bars of the rank of captain. "So you're a captain?" Lieutenant de Armas asked him.

"Got any water?" asked the other.

"Let's have a canteen!" said de Armas. Then he warned the captive: "Just take little sips so it won't do you any harm:...Are you a captain?"

"Well, yes, I am"...the bandit smiled. "You're not going to fire, right?"

He was identified as Manuel Martínez. Still to be found under those wavelike crests of earth was the killer of the Young Communist.

It did not take long: at 8.45, Clemente Aragón was almost literally dug up. "Another captain?" asked de Armas when he found the tin insignias of the bandit under his shirt. Clemente Aragón just smiled pitifully, then begged for a drink of water.

On their way back from the operation the fighters made jokes in the truck. "Yeah, they don't have any soldiers, they're all officers. We're the soldiers, we soldiers capture the bandit-officers" they said.

## A CRIMINAL TALE

Clemente Aragón seemed to be thrown upon his chair instead of simply sitting in it. His flabby white skin stood in sharp contrast with the black leather of the chair.

"Clemente Aragón" I said to him "I'd like you to tell me how you killed young Roberto Gutiérrez."

"Juan Alberto forced me to, Sir" he said.

"Yes, I know, Clemente Aragón."

"He forced me to do it, otherwise I would never have done that."

"Sure, right, but how did you kill him?"

On the night of September 7, Roberto Gutiérrez said goodbye early to his girlfriend. It was early in the night, and after that no more was known of him. Days later, Security agents dug up his body near Jatibonico River. The body was that of a young man. The coroners said he had been hanged.

The body would still be identified. Roberto's family was notified that he had been hanged by the bandits.

Years later the killers fell into the hands of Struggle against Bandits, LCB. Estervino Gutiérrez and Clemente Aragón had to confess the horrible crime to Security.

"He was walking along the edge of a canefield" said Clemente Aragón. "He walked along the edge and we were hidden in the canefield."

## "A COMMUNIST FOREVER"

"Halt!" Juan Alberto called out to the young man. "Halt!"

Juan Alberto aimed at him with his machinegun: "Who are you?" he asked. Young Roberto replied: "And who are you?"

"We're rebel soldiers" said Juan Alberto.

Roberto replied:

"Oh, I'm a militia member, I belong to the Young Communists" he said, thereby signing his death sentence.

The rifle butt in the face caught him by surprise:

"Hey, *compañero*, what's going on?"

"We're counterrevolutionaries!"

The Young Communist, rubbing his numbed face, stared at Juan Alberto: "Yes, well, I'm still a Young Communist! Patria o Muerte!" (Country or death).

At that point Clemente Aragón stopped his account.

"What did Roberto say to you then?"

"You're asking what the kid said, Sir?"

Roberto Gutiérrez, said Aragón, rubbed his face to ease the pain.

"Counterrevolutionaries!" Juan Alberto shrieked.

Roberto Gutiérrez looked at Juan Alberto and then at the rest of the band surrounding him. They laughed. Now he was a toy and they were going to smash the toy, it was a stupid, macabre game.

The night closed over their heads and Roberto Gutiérrez said to the bandits, who laughed: "Yes, I'll always be a Young Communist! Patria o Muerte!"

## THEY MADE ME HANG HIM

"Juan Alberto made him dig his own grave, yes, Sir, that's the way it was".

The large room with its Renaissance furniture was hot. I simply forgot to use my pencil and pad during the interview. I just looked at that man's face and especially at his hands, but I didn't need the pad and pencil, I could never have forgotten what he said.

"Then Juan Alberto made me hang him."

"How did he make you do that?"

"Well, he said, 'you and Estervino have to hang him' so we did."

I would have liked to ask him, with those hands? but I stopped myself.

"Aragón" interrupted officer R "explain to the *compañero* how you hanged him."

"You mean the way he walked away?"

"Yes, Aragón."

Aragón turned his face towards me again. "Well, Sir..." he said.

They slipped a piece of rope around Roberto's neck. "Problem was, the rope was very short, it was just a little piece, Sir."

"You on the left and him on the right" said Juan Alberto.

Roberto saw the gaping hole a few steps away. The moist earth shone in the moonlight. It was a quiet sheen that was most visible in the loosened roots along the edges of the hole.

"We led him to his grave, Estervino on one side and me on the other, then..."

"Then?"

"Then, Sir, I pulled on one side and Estervino on the other, we led him to his grave, strangling him at the same time."

"He's dead" shouted Estervino. The young man's head hung to the left, the weight of the rope was greater because Roberto was dead and his body did not sustain itself.

The young man hung onto the rope, but it was no longer possible. "I let go of the rope and so did Estervino. He fell into the grave..."

"And then, Clemente Aragón?"

"And then, Sir" he said "then we threw earth on him."

# THEY STIFLED A LIFE

I looked at Clemente Aragón's hands. His hands were still a dead, greenish river. "Those hands snuffed out a life" I said to myself.

"Anything more?" asked officer R.

"No" I said.

"But that's all I did, Sir."

"You can go now" said officer R.

The soldier armed with a pistol opened the door. Aragón got up. He looked at officer R and then at me. Then he repeated "but that's all I did."

The soldier with the gun opened the door. Aragón looked at us for the last time. "Goodbye, Sir."

"Goodbye, Aragón."

Aragón left the room first, then the soldier. As he left, Clemente Aragón dropped his hands along his sides. He seemed to be carrying something very heavy. The door closed.

# THE JUNGLE ROUTE TO THE STARS

*Cuba*, January 1967

## THEY CALL IT THE "JUNGLE ROUTE"

The pilots and navigators of Cubana Airlines call it the "jungle route." Local people, who are accustomed to using planes as the most convenient mode of transport, feel like pilots and they are well aware, all along the way, of just what turn the plane will take or when the landing gear will be lowered. They too call it the jungle route.

The route starts from the airport in Santiago de Cuba, on the south coast of the island, and covers the northern coast of Oriente province from Nicaro to Baracoa.

There is a close, symbiotic relationship between Cubana Airlines and the people who live on the north coast. The familiarity is due to the need for contact with the outside world. Now television signals reach the region of Baracoa. The Broadcasting Institute installed retransmission equipment there. But in Nicaro and Moa there is no such equipment, so there is no television, and radio is hard to pick up.

Building roads in the northern zone is an ongoing challenge for the builders. The Guantánamo-Baracoa road took seven years of hard work. Landslides in the mountains made it necessary to build a "flying corridor" alongside the mountain.

Maritime transport is almost nonexistent. There are just a dozen old schooners. So, Cubana Airlines wins with its potent Iliushin 14's and its veteran DC-3's. Each passenger-pilot of the north zone has their favorite plane commander, according to temperament, either more "conservative" or daring.

In winter the ceiling of grey clouds comes down to the peak of the mountains and the pilots know there is zero visibility. Their two engine craft are forced to stick to the airport. North coast people know when Cubana is in the air: all they have to do is look up.

Cubana's jungle route flights always end on short landing strips that end at the sea. The mountains run right down to the shore. Between the shore and the sea, at least, there are narrow strips of flatland. There the builders had to put up the airports.

From the Iliushins of Cubana you can get a good look at the "jungle." It is a special jungle, since it lacks thick forests. It has just those mountains of pure ore, red like rusty iron. On the plateau of Mayarí there are new pine forests, but after that, the mountains are bare.

In the jungle there are two mining centers, one in Nicaro and the other a hundred kilometers away in Moa. They mine nickel from the mountains and change the geography.

This is a jungle made of nickel.

From the window of the plane you cannot see the names, but they are there and they made this story.

## THIS MAN FROM CAYOGUÁN

To understand this man from Cayoguán you have to go out to the riverbank, where the steep slope from the mountain plunges vertically from sky to water and then that river, pushing and breaking against the sea. All the forces of nature came to life in Cayoguán. The force is there in the eyes of the man from Cayoguán, at times with the force of hatred, at times with that of indifference, but always hard.

On the river bank stand the skeletons, the naked wood, the grass that grows and covers the entire past of the man of Cayoguán. There used to be houses. They called them houses because of that old custom of using the word for anything with a roof. They were built on the river bank, clinging to the hillside, in the limited space lent by the mountain. The stilts and base beams were like his rickety, arched legs, and they were made of cheap, poor quality wood. The roofs and walls were made of leaves. The whorehouse was built in the same way, with the undefinable smell of the women and the grinding sound of the old, insect-ridden beds. There was a bar as well, because Cayoguán was an organized society. The most valuable thing in Cayoguán was right there, an oil-fueled refrigerator. The bottles of cheap, "ratkiller" rum stood dustily upon the refrigerator.

The Cayoguán copper mine plunges into the mountain but it is 500 meters above sea level. After Moa, about 15 kilometers away, the Cayoguán mine looms. People in Moa just can't imagine that Cayoguán exists, 15 kilometers away. Moa: the most up-to-date nickel works. Cayoguán: a bit of land, a land of hunger and copper. Moa: plant one produces ore pulp mined by 30 ton cranes. Cayoguán: the work crew, with their 30-pound hammers make smaller ore rocks out of the bigger ones. At Moa the metal of its plants screeches and shines under the spotlights. The man of Cayoguán says: "These tools are real old, real old" and looks around at the mine installations that look like the remains of a long-ago air raid.

Che Guevara was there in 1964 and said: this is no place for human beings.

New buildings were built five kilometers from the mine. Then houses were built. A tourist postcard would look fine today, in full color. The bright blue and grey buildings, with red trimming, stand out against the dark green of the mountain.

The day of the inauguration they went to the river bank. The women and children went too. They stood in front of the houses. They didn't look at them for long. There was no "home sweet home" memory in them. They charged angrily at every, stick, beam

and leaf, so that "no one can ever live there, ever." Just a few posts survived, but the grass will wipe out them too.

Everything but his gaze.

The man of Cayoguán caressed the wall of his house, smooth, cool as the rainy season, no mice or cockroaches, with a light that doesn't need a match to be lighted.

In the new store, one of the local men knocks on the counter, he is a tough-skinned man, toughened in the battle with the ore. He is the union secretary at Cayoguán. He knocks on the counter, and you can tell he wants to knock hard at the employee, who clearly doesn't feel like doing business right now. The man of Cayoguán learnt quite recently that he is entitled to good service.

## "...PRESILLA KNOWS A HELL OF A LOT ABOUT NICKEL"

Two hundred years a German producer reported that he had noted a "certain, very interesting alloy of iron and nickel that makes it very hard, and good for working."

In 1885 the Montataire plant in France turned out a type of steel-nickel. The results aroused interest among the English producers of armored plate. They assigned scientist Riley to study those alloys, and he showed the Iron and Steel Institute of England, in 1889, the worth of nickel and steel alloy; its versatility and hardness, especially for armored objects, was at once recognized.

Since then nickel has held the top place in steel alloys.

At present nickel has four basic types of production: structural or engineering steel for planes, cars, bridges, buildings, it uses 40 % of world output; arms and armor; wrought iron with nickel used for car cylinders and in steam engines, pistons, rings, water pumps and tools, this branch uses three % of world production; rust and heat resistant steel and alloys used mainly in the chemicals and

food industry, uses 20 % of world production; iron-nickel alloys, for industrial use because of their magnetic and electrical properties and because of its expansion properties, one percent of world output. Thirty eight percent of world production is used for unknown purposes and is the secret of many states, although it is believed to be used in the industry of sophisticated weapons, rockets and space vehicles.

In fact the production of steel alloys is essentially for military purposes while pure nickel is used with radioactive objectives.

Sixty percent of production is controlled by the Canada-based INCO (International Nickel Company) and this means that its price is stable. The Soviet Union follows INCO in production and Cuba is in fifth place.

The United States government was greatly interested in our plant at Moa. The most sophisticated technology was used there. The North Americans never got in on stream and laughed when the Revolutionary government nationalized it. "Some of the best US engineers have worked here, you people don't have the blueprints. Here the machinery is so new that it would be used for the first time, so you Cubans are never going to get Moa on stream."

Months after the nationalization Moa looked like a desert, a world of ghostly, dumb machines. The new machines, the automatic controls the boilers, the laboratories were all silent in Moa. The words of the North American echoes all over Moa: you Cubans will never get it on stream.

In the middle of 1960 a man with broad shoulders, big and feet a square face, grey hair and a large mouth, arrived in Moa, to take a look around during his vacation.

The dead, young factory moved him, it made him feel small. Three days later he spoke with Minister of industry Che Guevara, and said "you know, I think I can get it going."

Engineer Demetrio Presilla is now a legend all along the jungle route. Presilla is the man, the one who "knows all about nickel". Workers brag when they say "Sure, I work with Engineer Presilla."

The recently graduated engineers mutter "well, you shouldn't exaggerate, Presilla's time is passing." But Presilla is there: the plant has been the country's vanguard factory for three years, and Presilla was the one who got it going. He found engineers and specialized workers. They drew blueprints, revised, prepared. On July 22, 1961 the first load of nickel left Moa.

## THE TALE BEGAN IN 1906

On October 25, 1960 a plane landed on the strip at Nicaro. It carried a new manager for the plant, and he brought with him an order for its nationalization. The US directors signed the order and asked if they could take their papers. They could not. On October 25, 1960 a cycle of the jungle's history came to an end.

That history began in 1906 when United States Steel installed the Felton steel plant to the west of Nipe Bay. It would produce iron molds for the Mayarí steel smelting works. Felton operated from 1909 to 1919. Its production was for World War I.

In 1919 it stopped. Just once in a while the US company turned out small sample lots. In 1942 Felton's furnaces went off for good.

In the same year the Frederick Snare Corporation began to install a factory to the east of the bay opposite Felton, the Nicaro nickel works. Its production, too, would pour into the battlefields of Europe.

The jungle was divided up among three owners, Felton, Nicaro and United Fruit.

Workers from all over Cuba built the Nicaro plant. Five thousand men slept in hammocks, under the trees. The US company prepared the new society: they named a police force. Then the first houses for top management began to be built. The new US society launched its ascent: any protest was punished by the police and ouster from the place. The owners assigned a concession to businessman Filpo of Mayarí to set up a whorehouse in Cayo la Madama opposite Nicaro. Las Palmas club was built to the west. The

government Investigation Bureau set up operations in its new offices and prepared a file on all the Nicaro workers. In 1944 the Communist Party worked secretly among the workers to organized a union. The North Americans prepared their union, but victory went to the workers.

In November 1946 the US government shut down Nicaro. Panic spread. Hunger approached. United Fruit waited with open arms: World War II had ended.

But in 1952 war broke out in Korea. With death Nicaro returned to life, but now there was no union. The March 10, 1952 coup d'etat led by Fulgencio Batista would prevent all legal forms of struggle.

A few years later the light B-26 bombers of the Batista regime's air force hunted over Nicaro and plunged deep into the nearby mountains. They were searching for the Rebel Army, the members of the Frank País Second Front.

Even then the Frederick Snare Corporation was investing 75 million pesos 100 kilometers from Nicaro. The world's most up-to-date nickel works was being built at Moa. The B-26's flew there too. A time came when the open pit mines at Nicaro were bombed every day.

During one of the guerrilla operations Rebel Commander Pedro Sotto Alba fell outside the Moa army garrison. Standing before his grave, Commander Raúl Castro, chief of the Second Front, said: "Pedro, some day this plant will belong to the people and it will bear your name!"

On October 25, 1960 the US government tried to shut down Moa and Nicaro. That day the jungle plants were nationalized.

Now in Moa and Nicaro the geologists work and calculate. After that the crews map out the camps to be worked. The powerful 30 ton cranes seize nickel from the mountain and leave it open, without a drop of ore, looking like a moonscape. In the lands of the jungle are an estimated three billion tons of ore, the world's largest known reserves.

Meanwhile across from Nicaro the chimneys of Felton are active again. The workers have pledged to defeat time. The old furnaces creak with their production of manganese molds for export. A small train goes between Felton and Nicaro. It is the jungle's best surface transport. The engineer greets all the local people and stops beside the home of some old friends. A child of the house gives him coffee in a jar. The engineer takes it and caresses the boy's head. "Thanks, brother," he says.

## THE MEN OF THE JUNGLE ROUTE

### From Nicaro to Korea

José Mastrapa Braña, 70, an old bookworm.

"How long have you been on the jungle route?"

"For 15 years. I used to work in the offices of the owners of Nicaro. Now I run the plant's library. When I arrived here, the North Americans were remodelling Nicaro to produce more nickel on account of the Korean war."

"How much nickel had they produced?"

"I can look that up."

The veteran Mastrapa gets hold of a ladder and looks in all the shelves. He pulls out a large book and places it on the central table.

"That information is right here, let me get my glasses."

Mastrapa puts on his glasses. With pencil and paper in hand he starts to add up. He writes and erases, erases and writes, with care. Finally he says:

"The US management produced 212 million, 409 thousand 298 pounds of nickel, the equivalent of about 100 thousand tons."

## Lenin and the Bible

José Pineda, 42. He smells of gasoline. He smokes with his hands impregnated with gasoline.

"What job do you do?"

"I'm a crane operator, I work on a 30 tonner."

"Do you like it?"

"Yes, I like my work although sometimes those American cranes break down and then you have to get inside the engines and fool around with them."

"How much do you earn?"

"Nine pesos and 64 cents a day."

"What do you do after work?"

"After work I grab a shopping bag and go to the store to buy some food for the kids. Then I go home and read for a while and go to sleep because I'm not much of a runaround."

"What do you like to read?"

"I'm reading a book by Lenin about the political situation in 1917, but I can't read much because it hurts my eyes, and the doctors haven't been able to get rid of it. I guess I'll have it until the day I die. Then, besides Lenin, I read the Holy Book."

"You mean the Bible? Do you believe in God?"

"Well, I figure there must be something that knows more than we do, but I look at what Lenin says and what God says, and I see that God tells lies. The thing is, Lenin goes straight to what's really there."

"Oh..."

## Moa: the best school

Ernesto Ramírez, 33, manages Moa, the Vanguard Plant.

"Who runs Moa?"

"This Moa is a real challenge for the enemy, all the time. It has the newest of everything. Che Guevara said that Moa was the only virgin girl that the North American's couldn't exploit in our country. The North Americans never thought we'd get Moa going. After Presilla, a group of young engineers have been solving Moa's problems."

"I've heard people talk about the University of Moa..."

"Well, it's a school of the University of Oriente. The future engineers are trained here. They're worker-students. They earn 160 pesos a month and each year they get a 10-peso increase. They take exams every semester. Classes start at three in the afternoon and end at half past seven."

"After work, what do you do here?"

"What you could call social life is pretty scarce around here. We still don't have the facilities, there are few places to get entertainment, the population is small. At first, when you get here, you don't have friends and that makes life hard. In Havana there are things that don't exist in Moa."

"Like?"

"Like a television, a relative to go visit, a movie you can choose. That's life in these little places. But things are getting better. In Havana some people say they wouldn't like to come out here to work, they say it's the end of the world. But you have to tell them that Moa is the best school of engineering, besides, you make very good friends."

## Tomorrow you go to Nicaro

Luis Gálvez, 29. He likes to reminisce about his underground activities in the fight against Batista.

"What work do you do here?"

"I manage the Nicaro factory, the *Comandante* René Ramos Latour."

"Do you live here?"

"Yes, with my wife and one daughter."

"How did you happen to work here?"

"I worked in the Ceramics Enterprise. One day Che Guevara called me in and asked me if I'd been to Nicaro. I said no. He said, well, tomorrow you're going to Nicaro. I asked him, for how long, and he said, that doesn't matter, you're young. You'll only be there for 15 or 20 years."

"Has the enemy ever tried anything against the plant?"

"No, there haven't been any sabotage attempts. The workers here say that if they grab a saboteur they'll throw him alive in the reduction furnace."

"What does the plant produce?"

"Here we produce nickel sinter and nickel oxide. This production is mainly for export. Our shipments go mainly to the socialist camp and to France."

"How many people work here? Where are they from?"

"Three thousand 100 people work here. They're from the surrounding farm areas and others from further away, they came in the times of hunger and the North Americans."

Then Gálvez invites me to have a beer and brings out two large bottles filled with tiny raw oysters. Then he begins to tell of his underground experiences.

## Engine 11

Próspero Gómez Guerra, 52, with 25 years working in Nicaro. He has a hammer and sickle on his hard hat with the phrase "National Vanguard 1964-1966."

"So you're a National Vanguard worker?"

"Yes, I earned the title because of my hours of voluntary work. In the second half of 1965 I worked 1 467 voluntary hours."

"What is your job?"

"I'm a machinist, I worked on Engine 11, it used to be the largest engine in Cuba. Now I work in the warehouse. There I have a brigade called 20 Thousand Martyrs."

"Are you the head of the brigade?"

"Yes, when they gave me the National Vanguard title, Che Guevara told me to pick out whatever gifts I wanted. In fact I didn't want to take anything but Che insisted, so I picked out a pair of shoes and a gold pen and pencil set. Then Che said, Now you have to turn out more vanguard workers, so I organized the brigade."

"What are your aspirations?"

"I'm really satisfied now, I earn two pesos a day more than before the Revolution. I don't want my kids to go through what I went through. I don't want them to have to go to bed on a piece of sweet potato and a drink of water."

## The future of the jungle

Serafín Sánchez, 31, in charge of the jungle's Chief Plan. "What is the Chief Plan?"

"It's the coordination for the new projects in this zone. Here living conditions were very bad. Now they're getting better."

"What are the new installations?"

"The finished installations number 235, including houses, roads, parks, schools, cafeterias and places of entertainment."

"What are the prospects?"

"Here the country's future big steel industries will be built, the plans have already been drawn up. However we mustn't be in a hurry because the main thing now is the battle of agriculture."

"I meant the construction plans."

"Well, there are 1 002 dwelling units going up, plus two laundries, the Moa slaughterhouse, the radio retransmitting plant, two sports fields and 10 other installations. For the immediate future we've planned nine projects including roads, movie theaters and warehouses, also a motel in Moa."

# BORDER GUARDS

*Cuba*, December 1967

## THESE MEN OF THE DAWN

He is an infantry soldier. His knowledge and skills are the same as those of a regular army soldier, but he also possesses a thorough knowledge of counterinfiltration. He is called a Border Guard.

This man who woke up fifteen minutes ago is now standing at attention in front of his chief. He hasn't had coffee yet, just a cigarette after he brushed his teeth, and he smoked it at ease inside the tiny concrete hut. A mild cigarette that is pleasant to the throat and lungs.

He is clad in olive green fatigues, low boots that used to be black before they become covered with the mud of this key, a camouflage hood that they call a parka, loose and dark, that covers him from head to toe, with a large pocket at chest level. The belt, pulled in tight at the waist, with a canteen, a flashlight and a round of ammunition.

The chief does not demand a strict attention position. Mosquitoes need to be chased away by fanning them with the hand. If you stay still, they'll bleed you dry quicker than it takes to say it. There are millions of mosquitoes, fat, healthy, happy with their life on the keys, fed on so much Border Guard blood that they can hardly fly from being so stuffed.

The chief asks:

"Got any cigarettes?"

"I don't have any on me" answers the Border Guard.

"Matches?"

"No."

"Good for you, fine."

The moon hides like a coward behind the storm clouds. There are no stars in the sky. In the afternoon there was the usual shower, it lasted over an hour and the drops fell like 500 mm shells from fighter planes fired from a dive. The night sea is flat. It is a pirate night, fine for navigation in small speedboats, without being seen, without being hit by waves.

The chief checks the rifles and the magazines and adjusts the aiming devices. Everything is ready.

## GENESIS

Our barge approaches the dock at Panchita beach, on the north coast of Las Villas province. It is a heavy, slow supply barge, with a broad beam but a silent engine, well oiled, that consumes its petroleum with politeness, the way good table manners are supposed to be.

Opposite the prow a gull dives into the sea and then voluptuously plays in the water to get good and wet. After a day at sea I eat with the Panchita Border Guards. Rice, macaroni, fried tinned meat, sweets and some pretty tasteless slices of papaya because I didn't sprinkle them with sugar. Sitting beside me while we eat is Víctor, a skinny guy who scratches his feet a lot. Víctor loks at the sea and says: "It's a fine night for the pirates to be nosing around." A cloudy night and a calm sea. The canteen was built right after the pier, on the sea, no walls, just a floor and a roof, a kitchen and tables.

Then Víctor laughs:

"Hey, life is really something. Things happen every once in a while that makes you feel a little tickle here inside and then you really feel good about your work. I went into the village and a girl asks me, 'Are you Víctor?'... 'Sure am,' I say. 'How come you ask?' 'No, no reason', she says. 'Gosh darn, I said to myself.'"

This Víctor is a strongjawed man who smokes big cigars. Suddenly the storm breaks over Panchita. The black, muscular clouds come from the mountains to the coast. They come with a roar, like a herd of Brahma cattle, shooting lightning at whatever is standing on the earth. The sea, flat until then, turns uneasy, rough. The downpour begins, pushed from one side to the other by the gusts of wind. Our supply boat rocks against the pier. A Border Guard comes from far away to take shelter under the roof. Now we all look very small and sad.

The storm will end at some point. And when it does, all the scum of nature will come to the surface: the crabs, cowardly, hypocritical, tucked into their shells, walking backwards with their claws at the ready. Spiders, mosquitoes, gnats, dragonflies, flies; steamy heat.

At first it was just the storm and the keys and the coast below. And even before that it was just the sea alone until the sea gave up some of its own bed and the land cropped up. Between the land and the sea the shore swamps were left, those freaks of nature, sandbars with two or three feet of water, where mangrove and coral grew and where the coastal birds left their dead grandparents and the shells, too, ended up there. Then the keys arose, antechamber of the coast.

## TWELVE THOUSAND DOLLARS FOR TWO SLICES OF SKIN

Germán's ears are two very ordinary ears. They really are just plain ears, with the openings for sound to enter placed in the same

location as in all other people in the world; the little bones are right there, all in place, with a few hairs on the upper edge. I really don't know what the United States Central Intelligence Agency sees in those ears of German's, but it offered 12 thousand dollars cash to anyone who took them to Miami.

"Okay, Germán, you tell me, why is the CIA after your ears?"

Germán smiles and adjusts his AKA on his shoulder, takes a slow breath, places the barrel slightly to the front. There at 150 meters, the movable targets of the training field appear. Germán gently pulls the trigger and leaves it like that until the final pull takes place and the target flies apart.

The empty cartridge drops to the ground. Another new bullet is placed in the chamber. The targets move forward. He fires. "I always hit it" he says.

Raúl Rodiles, "war name", Germán, 26. Combat history: shooting lead since the insurrectionary struggle," and in the fight against the pirates since the formation of the first Border Guard units.

The enemy agent who was captured right after being infiltrated told him about it: "So you're Germán, are you?" Germán said yes. "Well, the CIA is offering 12 thousand dollars to anyone who takes the ears off your dead body to Miami," said the agent.

Germán, Raúl Rodiles, sees a new target at 200 meters. He adjusts his sight and murmurs: "You've had it, old buddy." That's what the agent said: "They're offering 12 thousand because you cost them a lot of money in men and equipment." Then: "They're mad at you." Germán is not a lieutenant or captain, but a Border soldier and he feels bad about the price the CIA placed on his head. "I'm not all that cheap, 12 thousand isn't much. They've set higher prices on other *compañeros*. I plan to kill some more pirates to see if they up the ante."

## AND WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?

Cuba is an island with a long border that the Border Guards describe as *coastal-maritime*. Their mission: protect the country from enemy activities. While behind them the nation goes about its business of building socialism, they make up a military force in constant, silent operations. Their enemy is very subtle: small infiltration teams, frogmen, intelligence agents, the *lancheros* (speedboat skippers), the sabotage boats.

The Border Guards have built their unit quarters, plain prefab huts which at times are comfortable, radio equipment, radar when needed and an ample supply of ammo for their fine AKA's (Soviet-made automatic rifles). The members of this coastal team are responsible for surveillance in the assigned sector. The watchword is that no infiltration mission must get through there.

That is the CIA's pet activity: maritime infiltration operations. In Cuba they discarded air infiltration activities since January 1961, when the revolutionary forces captured several air drops of arms and agents. The CIA decided the long, bare Cuban coast was more suited to the development of its activities.

## AMBUSH

I'm sailing in number 325 toward the ambush at La Cruz. For a month, four Border Guards have been waiting for the landing of an infiltration team (the information department has estimated the approximate arrival date). Now they're waiting. We'll spend the night there, waiting too. If they don't come tonight, the ambushes will be lifted "until the next time."

A storm runs ahead of number 325. To the left, on the coast, another storm is in process. Epifanio Hernández is the skipper of the 325, Esteban Montero is its gunner. It begins to rain. We three

huddle together, wrapped in a plastic sheet, at the stern rudder. Ernesto, the photographer, is sleeping off a hangover in the tool room.

Esteban says: "Once a bad storm hit us and made us lose our course. I'd gone to a military school in Havana where I learned to understand the stars, so I said to the skipper, listen, skipper, we've been out for hours and we've got the Big Dipper at the prow, that means we're going to hit enemy territory. I don't understand all that witchcraft, says the skipper, but get the Big Dipper to the stern, just in case...Nine hours later we saw the coast of Cuba."

Our 325 reaches the ambush. The place is called Las Cruces but in a novel a better for it would be the mangrove inferno. It's a bend in the coast, where a tiny stream, flows into the sea. We don't have solid earth under our feet, just the slippery roots of the mangrove to place your boots, then above the layer of mosquitoes and gnats is the night. Four hammocks hang from the firmest mangrove; some boards by way of a kitchen and table "so we get to have a hot meal every so often." Here are the four Guards, while our 325 departs, leaving Ernesto and me unprotected before the pitying smiles of the veterans:

Roger Camacho, 19, with long sideburns grown during the month-long ambush. Chief of the group. He goes around barefoot in the mangrove. His new boots hang from his hammock.

Luis Ruiz, Grandpa, 34. A fine cook. He says: "If the enemy comes, get behind the mangrove, it's kind of thin and the bullets go right through it, but never mind, you just get behind the mangrove."

Alberto Marrero, 15. "They call me Shaved Head." He too goes barefoot in the mangrove, "used to all this." His eyes have grown cloudy due to the lack of sleep.

Osvaldo López, 20. A military draft recruit. He has a towel around his neck to protect him from the gnats and mosquitoes. "This is really crazy, a whole month killing mosquitoes, people just can't imagine what it's like."

They assign me a hammock and I try to sleep. On my phosphorescent watch dial I watched the passage of each and every one of the sixty minutes of the tenth hour on that night of ambush. When I stick my head out of the plastic sheet that covers my hammock, I see just how grotesque nature is.

The female mosquito pulls an act of diversion, because she buzzes to the right while the male bites from the left. The plastic sheet, the tide, the hammock, the rising tide, the snakes, the scorpions, the morena fish, the gnats and me, amusing myself with the luminous dial of my watch. The *corua* bird screeches. Luis "Grandpa," fills the Border Guard night with his cheery, picaresque tales, told in a quiet voice so no pirate can hear. Without Luis' stories, what would become of those nights?

The silence is sudden. The rain falls on the plastic sheet. The pleasure of hearing the mosquito outside the plastic sheet, where he can't get me. At 11 PM, a commercial airliner flies over, thousands of feet above our heads. From the sound of its piston engine I figure it's an Iliushin-14. I imagine the passengers, calm and happy in the aisle of the plane, about to arrive home, in the tenuous light inside the craft.

We share a pack of cigarettes, long and delicious, smoked inside the plastic sheet so we don't give our presence away. Finally, at four, Luis decides to make coffee and gives me some in a field cup. It is so hot that it flies from my hands into the water at my feet. The water, the dawn, is like a thick, purple, still paste. On the horizon, the light tries to slip through, bright orange, behind the clouds. The pirates were smart that night. The AKA's hanging from the mangrove, remain silent and sad.

## GOOD...GOOD...GOOD, CENTELLA!

He pats his back, caresses his head and says to him, like a compliment: good...good...Good boy, *Centella* (Shooting Star)! And Centella leaps out like a bullet to bite the pirate. That is the signal he learned since puppyhood: "Good boy, Centella!" And Centella, with his dog's head, knows that it means go bite the pirate.

The pups are pretty, with black muzzles, very affectionate, with fat paws. You'd love to have a pup like that at home, pat it, caress its back and sink your hand into his fur and regale him with a bit of that master's love. However they grow up and hate everyone but their master. And they hate so hard that their mouths bleed.

"Good friends of the border guards" say the police dog trainers. They are now training and they gather around a bonfire at point H. A firefly is around and someone seems to be smoking a cigarette. There is a smell of cow manure and the sound of a nearby stream. The wood snaps in the fire. The dirty jokes. The coffee in the canteen. The shared pack of cigarettes. There is a technical conversation: the Green Berets of the United States special forces use police dogs in the pursuit of Vietnamese guerrillas.

"Oh, those are bad dogs" someone says from the darkness, then there is a curse. The dogs sleep nearby, with their humid muzzles between their front paws.

Imported dogs do not become acclimated. The change in climate from the Soviet Union or Czekoslovakia is too violent. Cuba needs to "produce" its own police dogs.

It's an interesting story. German shepherds are descended from a cross between the wolf and the jackal. If one of the German shepherds is crossed with a wolf, the old blood is reactivated, they get stronger and smarter.

"The dog learns from petting, you have to build the dog's life. At four months we begin their training. The first thing is get him used to his guide, the guide he'll have his whole life. After that he is taught to follow tracks and to be fierce."

There is nothing the pirate dislikes more than being chased by a dog. "Makes'm wild, man!"

A guide says: "The dog I love best is Centella, this big, good dog. The son of a bitch knows me and when he hears me approaching he gets happy. What a dog!"

# WAITING FOR FOOD

We wait for our meal. The guides rest around Agapito. One of them, very young, meditates as he rubs the handle of his AKA. The battery-powered radio creates a weird situation in this solitude because it is broadcasting pop music. The dogs even imitate the way the guides walk, says Agapito.

Another talks to his dog as if it were a woman: "What a wanton thing you are, how tame you are, how playful!"

El Chino says: "Hiking is the best thing in the world. That's what I love, hiking with all my combat gear."

Someone is teasing Lázaro Rodríguez, who is very large and very black: "Lázaro's father came round asking for a light colored mulatto guy, real thin, named Lazarito". I said, "well what we have here is a big black guy, real big guy, known as Big Lázaro. You know, parents have the same sight as the guide has with his dogs." People laugh and Lázaro is annoyed.

Lázaro is known because of the time he chased an infiltrated enemy agent with his dog Huracán and captured him at Playa Menéndez, or the second time, in Varadero, when his dog found the papers of planes sunk in the water. But Huracán died and now Lázaro has another dog.

Rolando Pérez, 24, says: "When I saw the dogs in the first operations, I said to myself, this is what I want to do. I told the chief of the region that I wanted to be a dog guide. Here they gave me Comando, one of the larger pups. Comando is that black and brown dog over there, the brave one, hey, good guy, I'm right over here!"

In the distance we see the mess truck arrive. I'm really wolf-hungry, but first the dogs have to be given their food. I find a cockroach wandering over my pants and crush it with my notepad. It crunches.

# ON OPERATIONS

He was a fisherman, sir, a fisherman like any other, one of those who feel good when they sink there feet into the beach and let the sand slip through his misshapen calloused feet. A fisherman in good and bad times, with lovely dreams of grandeur: return to land with the hold filled with fish, golden dreams of rivers of beer and a wellspring that never dries up. Or the return to land with the hold empty, with hands begging to the sun. He was a fisherman like any other, with pants rolled up above his knees, barechested, toothless, brave.

For now, let's call him Saturno, Saturno the fisherman.

And so: in the center of Las Villas province, 100 kilometers from Santa Clara in the town of Isabela de Sagua, is the rest home. Nine men are hidden there. They are frightened men. They have hastily shaved off their long hair and beards.

They burned their old clothes. They carefully hide their field weapons. They come from the Escambray, where they were a counterrevolutionary band. Now they want to escape to the United States and they seek the favor of someone who has a boat, any kind of boat...

Then that fat man from the city of Santa Clara, that Cancio Berol, that white man with grey hair and uneasy eyes, with the manner of a businessman, visited the beach and observed the fishermen. One day he noticed Saturno. Cancio Berol had his instructions from the bandits, who promised him good money.

One day Cancio Berol approached Saturno:

"Do you have a match so I can light up? Great, thanks. How's the fishing? Pretty bad, I guess, the times are bad. Sure, that's the problem, nothing good. I guess you really could use some money, right? A green roll of bills in your pocket, eh? I've been watching you the past few days, you're a quiet, hardworking man, what can I say? You're a trustworthy man."

Cancio Berol went back many times to become a friend of Saturno's. He invited him to drink beer and Saturno was delighted. "That's it..." said Cancio Berol "we're great pals!" As soon as Cancio Berol returned to town, Saturno got together with "some old friends." They asked him: "What did the fat man have to say today?" And Saturno replied: "Still nothing...maybe the fish'll decide to bite tomorrow...he's a real strange fish...but really strange."

Until finally:

"What would you say to a very important trip outside the country? Lots of money, believe me, it's really important. Here you have 4 500 pesos, and you'll get 4 500 more as soon as you get back...if you agree. Nine thousand pesos, how about it?"

"Well" mused Saturno. "With so much money involved, anyone would think it over...And who are those important people?"

Cancio Berol replied: "They're from the Escambray."

They set the departure for midnight the following day. They would meet on the highway at kilometer 83. Saturno said goodbye to Cancio Berol and sped off like a new Oldsmobile to see his "old friends." He dumped the 4 500 pesos on the table, and half an hour later the plan was ready.

At night the fishermen of Isabela de Sagua sleep in their wooden houses. Early in the morning they go out to sea again. They quietly smoke their cigarettes, awed, filled with the mystery of the ocean that brings the voices of faroff fisherman from other lands.

And then, the day.

And then, later, the night again.

At 12 midnight, right between the two days, Saturno waited at kilometer 83.

"The two cars arrived very slowly. They introduced me to the people. A man of my height, six feet, thin, white as a sheet of paper, hung behind the others. He looked like he was hiding. He wore lightcolored pants and shirt. He was the leader of the band. Yes, he must've been around 32."

"As we got to the coast, the chief ordered: Sergeant, line them up as usual!

"And those people lined up, all really military. I made them coffee, on the boat, the Haydelina, and the leader said: You're in charge now. I put my shorts on because, according to the plan, I'd have to swim a lot. The Haydelina's engine was new, an eight HP Soviet engine.

"'See this gun?' said the leader. 'I'm a brave guy and I'm going for lieutenant.'

"Opposite the Juan drop, I saw the flash, the light signal. The first round struck the boat and I threw myself backward into the sea. The water was cold. As I jumped I heard a final shout: They killed the fisherman! I took my shorts off to swim more comfortably. I pulled my head out, to take a breath and I saw our speedboats chasing the Haydelina. I reached a key. Then they picked me up."

The Border Guards waited in three boats, two armed with V-Z's and one with Super-Fal's. They fired the first round and Saturno was warned. The second round struck the leader, who fell dead, sitting, upon the helm. The bandits couldn't get the shooting to stop and they shouted: "We give up! The speedboats pulled up. Don't move."

"Don't worry, we won't, we just want to get out of this!"

"Good for you."

The Border Guards boarded the Haydelina. There were some wounded. From the hold a bandit emerged who lit a cigar and said: "Well, that's that, the dead man is dead and the rest will die."

"You have no scruples" they answered.

"Well, that's life."

Another bandit pleaded for some water.

He was given water in a canteen, he leaned back, exclaimed "aaah" and died. There was a strong tide that tide, a strong south wind. Perhaps you have some accounts pending with the revolutionary justice and would like to leave the country in a hurry.

Make sure you don't have any dealings with Saturno, whose real name, at the recommendation of the Border Guards, is not Saturno.

## WELL, GENTS, BE SEEING YOU!

I provoke a controvery about bullets and pirates. The four soldiers opposite me are enthusiastic. They like the topic of conversation. They, are, from left to right:

Lieutenant Roberto Román, 29, team chief. Veteran of the Sierra Maestra: "There's no such thing as a good pirate or an AKA that misfires."

Sergeant Pedro Fernández, 23. Machinegunner and explosives specialist: "we have a commitment of honor to our country and our people to smash the pirates."

Soldier Rolando Serguera, 18. He is the howitzer man of the unit: "I remember when we captured the skipper known as El Flaco (Skinny) on his way to pick up some people to take them out of the country illegally. The dogs followed his trail and we nabbed him and his people."

Carlos Fonseca, 24, radio operator: "A Cessna light plane flew over Caibarién to drop cans of incendiary gelatine and was knocked down by a similar plane flown by revolutionaries, they equipped it with a V-Z and smashed the other one to bits on a key. The pilot of the enemy Cessna died on the way down."

I think about the notorious Central Intelligence Agency making its plans in Florida, while these four soldiers, its enemies, speak with amusement of lead and explosives, smoke large cigars and laugh. For now, I decide to finish my notes and I tell them so. They pay no attention to me and after a while, one of them casually remarks: "The leftwing intellectual is taking his leave."

# OPERATIONS IN STRUGGLE AGAINST THE BANDITS

*Mella*, Saturday, June 29, 1963

## START OF THE OPERATION

The drivers of Soviet Gaz and Zil trucks seem to want to break the law of gravity. The paths and ravines that mules find tough going are the daily bread of these machines.

"It just won't fit here" you think as the truck roars among the gravel and stones...but fit it does, and in a few seconds, we're on the other side.

Most operations start like that. The first rays of the sun are received on wheels.

The early morning chill is like a razor blade. Each man bundles up as best as he can and the bed of the truck resembles a meeting of Islamic worshippers, wrapped up in hammocks and plastic sheets.

The truck stops.

To either side there is an endless row of militia troops. They are stretched out on the grass with their Soviet automatic rifles and their M-52's aimed at the woods. It is the encirclement.

Behind us, several jeeps indicate the command post. Commanders Tomassevich and Dreke are there, along with Captain Paneque, who is going to direct the operation.

At an order, the occupants of the trucks get out. They will perform the combing operation.

## THE COMB

A combing operation is precisely that: a comb.

One man alongside the other, on and on, and they advance, searching thoroughly all the places they pass through.

When the formation is narrowed, so that its fighter can touch the hand of the ones beside him, it is known as a *proletarian comb*; when this is not the case, and the distance is greater, then it is a *bourgeois comb*, a sloppy comb. *The advance begins.*

The comb is ready. The men in their position await the order to advance.

In the center is Paneque with his FAL and his cigar. To his right, Ceferino, a farmer of medium height, with a broad back and a skin full of sun. To the left is Abad, an 18-year-old sergeant.

*Bayamo* –Paneque's nickname– says, almost inaudibly: "Advance."

I expected a shouted "advance" full of sound and fury, but that's not the way it turned out.

I'd just discovered one of the techniques of *Lucha Contra Bandidos*, Fight against Bandits, known as LCB: the human telephone.

All along the line of men, and in the same tone as *Bayamo*, the order ran: "Advance..."

And then, with the first steps of the comb, I fully understood the heroism and sacrifice involved in LCB.

Hundreds of men, combing in the open, against an enemy who may well be waiting for them, well hidden and positioned, and well-armed and supplied.

The bandits might be anywhere. But our men advance without uninterruption.

"That's the way to fight the bandits, standing up!"

Porrúa, head of a company, is the speaker. Across his chest he carries the cartridge belt of a signal pistol. Beside him is a youth with a *checo*, an M-52 light machinegun.

"His name is Michel" says Porrúa. "He said he's 18 to be able to come on operations but he's really just 16."

Our attention is distracted by a helicopter that flies just a few meters above ground.

The craft with its large arms hovers in the air for a new moments. Then it drops vertically. When it touches the ground, a skinny, shirtless pilot gets out: César.

"Get in!" he shouts to us.

## THE HELICOPTER

The pilot of this MI-4 seems to think his craft has the features of a plane. Once he is a few meters up, he speeds up to 100 kilometers an hour.

In the rear cabin we are accompanied by two observers and, seated in the machinegun turret, the chopper's gunner. They look down, almost without blinking, scrutinizing each stone and tree.

The craft makes several passes over the long row of the comb. From down below the fighters greet it by shaking both hands over their heads.

When the MI-4 gains in altitude, the gunner leaves his spot in the turret and joins us.

His name is Antonio. He wears an olive green overall and a flight helmet.

"I'm the mechanic of this little animal" he says with pride, stroking the chopper's wall. "I'm 19."

Two bells interrupt the newly-begun conversation. They announce that we are arriving at the command post.

## ANOTHER OPERATION

In a rustic structure near the command post are commanders Tomassevich and Dreke. Another commander has arrived this afternoon: René de los Santos.

Seated on rawhide, rustic chairs tilted against the wall, they savor the hard crust of cornmeal that the woman of the household has given them to eat, since she has no coffee to offer.

Tomás leads us to a table with maps.

"Look" he says moving his finger along a blue line named the Jatibonico River. "This is the zone where *they* are. Today's operation, although as you see, we haven't met up with anything, is decisive because it means that if they're not here, they're at the Jatibonico...you'll see!"

## THE OTHER OPERATION

This second operation did not take off early in the morning: the trucks left at nightfall.

The encirclement is set up quickly. In just a few minutes the escape routes are cut off. And it is an area of tens of kilometers!

In the center of our encirclement is a cluster of rocky hills and the Jatibonico. Domingo, the topographer, who is constantly

kidded about the time he couldn't find a town on the map, tells us about the encircled zone. He knows it like the palm of his hand.

"Nearly all the topographers here" says Domingo "are from the country and we know our zones inside out."

From behind Tomassevich and René de los Santos reach us.

"Are you people hungry? We haven't had any lunch today. Let's see if we can find an open store."

We unanimously approved the motion and in two jeeps we crossed the dusty, dry road.

The manager must have been surprised to see two commanders and others show up at his store at nine at night to ask it he could sell them "a tin of something to eat with bread."

But the manager, perhaps because he was nervous or just sleepy, couldn't get the tin open. Finally Tomás grabbed a knife and made some sandwiches.

Russian tinned meat, without preparation, is hardly to be compared with the way the LCB cooks fix it up: a really "bitter" experience.

## THE BANDITS THINK THEY GET THROUGH THE ENCIRCLEMENT

Early in the morning, the comb began to advance.

One portion heads for Camagüey and the other for Las Villas. From one bank to the other of the Jatibonico, the fighters greet each other.

"Hello from Las Villas!" says one, by way of greeting.

The vines along the river stop the advance of the troops; they hang on to their light machineguns and the thorns streak their skin with blood.

The sun is higher than ever, as if it wanted to broil us.

Finally it occurs to us to search a cave that the river passes through.

But we can't all fit in. Ernesto the photographer, Captain Paneque and two soldiers make a rustic raft out of some poles; they place their weapons on it and move into the cave.

Meanwhile, rough "dogtooth" rock is our fate, Edmundo loses the soles of his shoes but keeps advancing.

One fighter with blond hair and his beret perched on the back of his head, slips and cuts his knee on the sharp stones. A circle of blood marks the deep wound. The paramedic comes, takes a look at his leg and places gauze pads on it.

"You'll have to stick it out until the end of the comb to get that really taken care of."

"Just what did you think I was going to do?" asks the offended soldier.

Suddenly, to the left, about half a kilometer away, we hear explosions.

"The bandits!"

The news runs along the comb.

The sergeants find it hard to hold their men back. They all want to head for the shooting.

They stay put, but are very unhappy about it.

The comb has stopped and waits.

The order arrives by human telephone: "Keep advancing."

## NIGHT

Night falls and all we know is that three militiamen fought the bandits. The volume of fire of our men forced them to scatter within the depths of the encirclement.

But, in the believe that they have crossed the LCB lines, the enemies of the people launch a hasty march to move out of the zone.

Hundreds of militia surround them.

It is just 11 o'clock.

Evaristo Herrera is positioned on the ground. Five meters away from him is the start of a large *marabú* thicket. The moon is clear.

Sergio Santana, who is beside him, sees the six men emerge from the thicket. They are sure of themselves. Their M-3's hang from their shoulders.

"Look at them!" shouts Sergio as he cocks his gun.

The bandits try to escape.

A rain of lead falls upon them. Sergio's gun locked.

The desperate bandits run toward Sergio, firing as they move.

Then Evaristo suddenly leaps from his position and from the flank that is invisible to the killers, he fires the complete charge of ammunition.

## VICTORIOUS

From the farthest points of the encirclement the troops approach to congratulate Sergio and Evaristo. Two *compañeros* had wiped out a complete band of counterrevolutionaries.

The two, seated on the spot that just four hours before was filled with lead, they happily receive the handshakes and the greetings.

When we ask them if they are Young Communists, Evaristo says yes. Sergio is pensive, then says, sadly:

"When I came out for operations, I was still a candidate member...I don't know if I got accepted or not."

"But Sergio, you're every bit as much of a Young Communist as anyone!" says an older man with a white beard, while he rumples his hair with a paternal gesture.

## THE END AND A LESSON

My notebook contains a series of names, all of them of brave, self-sacrificing men.

Pérez Lastre, Palacios, Gustafé, Cándido, Rodríguez, Arnoldo...and the always anonymous, except for their heroism, members of State Security.

And many more, the radio operators, the technicians, the guides...

They comprise LCB. They are a concrete sampling, a great example of solid, self-sacrificing revolutionaries.

The fighters of LCB are a source of pride for the workers, students, farmers.

For the bad student, the ones who work with poor quality, for the laggards, the ones who are absent a lot, they are a great lesson.

Those people should reflect, close their eyes for a moment and move to the fields of action of the *Lucha contra Bandidos*: the combs, the nights spent watching and waiting, the long hikes, the days without eating...

They should reflect and think of those fighters! They and people like them daily make our history in defense, production and study.

*Cuba*, February 1964

## A LEGEND IS BORN ON THE 17th

One of the heroes of Playa Girón is Bouzac. A short mulatto, when he wears his flight suit for high altitudes, he looks like a Cuban Yuri Gagarin. He likes to recall a story about the fighting in the skies over the Bay of Pigs:

Back at base in his English fighter plane, after having "combed with bullets" the mercenary positions, he saw he was flying over a thoroughfare of tracer bullets. Behind him two light B-26 light bombers tried hard to shoot him down.

Taking advantage of his greater maneuverability due to the lightness of his plane, Bouzac placed himself at the tail of one of them. The enemy pilots were so sure of the nonexistence of the Cuban Revolutionary Air Force that they removed the machineguns from the tail to increase the number of bombs.

In military aviation, having a slower plane in front is an easy shot, but when the Cuban pilot pulled the firing device of his guns, he noted that his ammunition had run out. It was a bitter moment.

With just enough gasoline to land, out of ammo ("I was sandwiched in between them and guiding them back to our base"), he

got a good idea and radioed to base, knowing the B-26's were listening to his frequency.

The enemy planes heard Bouzac ask the control tower to remove the bombs from the wing of Migs and to take off with air-air rockets, since he was heading home with two enemy planes.

Swerving to the right, the mercenary bombers withdrew from the possible battle. A few minutes later Bouzac's fighter plane touched down on the strip at base, where in addition to his own, there were six others with combat *possibilities,* after some timely adaptations of truck brakes, car points and other items.

Those were the days when our air force was forged. On April 17, 1961 the popular legend of the revolutionary aviation was born. Needless to say, the Migs were imaginary. The most up-to-date planes in the Revolutionary Air Force were two T-33 trainer jets, US-made, of which just one was actually able to fight. In those 72 hours of battle, from April 17 to 19, a parallel was drawn between our pilots and Alexei Maresiev, the legless Soviet air ace. Ours were planeless pilots.

## PHYSICAL CONDITION: "A GOOD APPEARANCE"

The Migs are on the strip. They are like iron soldiers in perfect formation. From up close they look like tigers ready to leap upon their prey. Portuondo is in the cabin of the first one.

The engine begins to roar loader and loader. The tarmac seems to tremble –and tremble it does!– before the strength of the craft and of the human being. The time of the "six old, beat-up planes" is but a memory.

Portuondo runs along the strip and lifting the nose of his 03, he begins to climb straight and fast above the palms, above the clouds, almost up to the sun, where he is a tiny silver dot.

Portundo began to study aviation with a correspondence course in 1956:

"At that time I was a gardener in a private home and all the money I made went to pay for the course. I was very keen but didn't know a thing about aviation, and the course was a lot of theory and no practice."

I ask why he didn't enroll in the aviation school and he replies:

"No, I couldn't have gone to that school. There was a clause that required as a physical condition having a good appearance. The owners of the house where I worked were completely clear about that and they always said to me: 'Kid, don't be silly, don't waste your time on that, don't you realize that isn't for colored people?'... Naturally, to their way of thinking (a broad smile) we black people couldn't ever be nice looking!" And he ends his words: "That clause was just a trick to keep blacks from becoming pilots."

Three years later, in the contingent of pilots hastily put together for training by the Revolution, tall, black smiling Iván joined the Rebel Air Force.

Manuel Arias also wanted to be a pilot. More skeptical and less of a dreamer than Iván, he didn't even bother to take a correspondence course. ("What for? It would have been a waste of time.") Moreover, as he himself tells it:

"After the victory of the Revolution, I was in a militia school and every so often I used to see the planes fly over and I said to myself: "Me a flier? No way!"

He had the fixed idea that he couldn't be a flier and it was hard for him to overcome that pessimism.

Now he flies a Mig 21.

"Up there I feel like the most powerful of men, knowing that I'm working with the world's best interceptor, which does just what my hands order it, and at times, I dream, for the first time."

## SOLOING

Not only black people were the victims of discrimination in aviation. Pretus is white and even blond. From afar, with his dark glasses, he looks European. But there was another clause that said that the members of the school of aviation had to be "economically solvent." And Pretus washed floors, "at Oficios Street number 106, I remember it as if it were today."

He too is among those who thinks he is dreaming. His most exciting moment was when he soloed, without his instructor in the rear of the cabin.

"This is the most important moment in the life of an aviation student and it takes place after the instructor is sure that you can do it. I was supposed to have soloed a long time before I really did. But I just couldn't make it, everything came out wrong! I always got nervous even though I had the instructor right behind me and waited for him to give me orders.

"I always knew what to do, but I didn't do it. I don't know why I had that problem with the instructor. Almost always in the landing, the toughest part of the flight, he had to shout to me, gas, gas, gaaas! and then I really gave it gas. But finally I got my chance and ran the plane along the strip. If I get it up, I can land it, I said to myself.

"Every so often I looked back to see if I had the instructor with me. After I was in the air for a while I finally realized I was alone in the plane, thousands of meters up. Then I began to sing, shout, cheer myself, while they inquired anxiously from the control tower, Hey, Pretus, are you okay? Respond!

"But once that degree of excitation was over I started to hear weird sounds all over the place. The awful idea of a forced landing came to my mind and I thought two things, what the hell am I doing here? and, motorists have it made, all they have to do is pull up, park, fix the car and they're all set! But in fact, there wasn't a thing wrong, it was just my nerves...and of course..."

Pretus delivers his punch line:

"... I landed it!"

## "I'LL BE A PILOT IN THE NEXT WAR"

Diego Oquendo is 24 but looks 19. He is strong and oozes good health. Like all the pilots in this squadron of interceptor planes, he looks cool with a starched shirt.

As a beared combatant (today he is smooth shaven, as the regulations require) he learned about aviation from the damage it did:

"Lots of my *compañeros* are still mad at planes, not because of what they did to us, because they're not much use against guerrillas, but because of what they did to the rural people of the area.

"I didn't react that way, I liked to look at them. Naturally, in between bomb blasts. I said to myself, In the next war I'm going to be a pilot."

He recalls other times and says:

"I was really always involved with high altitude activities: before heading for the Sierra Maestra, I belonged to an underground team that sabotaged elevators in public buildings."

Diego wears his olive green uniform with simplicity. His only two insignias are his officer's bar and his pilot's wings. He continues his account:

"As soon as we came down from the mountains and reached Havana, I said I wanted to be a pilot and they authorized me to study."

That was when the worst of mental tortures grabbed me, and it happens of everyone who wants to be a pilot: "is my physique okay?"

"Well, it turned out to be okay and classes started. That's when you realize that all you ever thought about aviation was a drop in the bucket, that it is a thousand times more exciting and that you've chosen your life's work."

There are no people more enamored of their work than sailors and aviators. For example, Commander Carreras, 40, a hero of Playa Girón.

He speaks of his flying hours the way a sailor would. He is an old *airwolf*. He is proud when the doctors say he is every bit as fit to fly as the youngest men.

But his greatest source of happiness is his six thousand flying hours.

"That amounts to 250 days, or eight months nearly a year in the air, across the ocean, the land, day and night!"

Let's hope they never appoint him to the general staff. He can't stand the idea of dying anywhere but in the cabin of his plane.

## A THOUGHT AT 2,000 KILOMETERS AN HOUR

Human beings *think* unconsciously just as they *look* automatically. But let's look at a pilot in flight: he moves along at 18 thousand meters altitude, with a speed over twice that of sound.

In every turn of his head he checks the controls, looks for enemy targets outside, rectifies his position and altitude. He must be another part of the machine, he must think and look with utter premeditation.

His nervous tension and sweat reach such a point that when the pilot completes his flight, he has lost five pounds. Only a rigorous diet of "overfeeding" keeps them going.

For these flights science developed a number of devices. Everything has become complicated. Flight clothing is not just cloth but an anti-flammable machinery with compressed air hoses that keep the lungs from exploding due to pressure; oxygen masks that keep the blood from boiling; plastic helmets; special pockets for pistol and dagger. A whole series of devices that would fill any space fashion magazine.

## THE IMMENSE SUN

Llerena is the most serious of the pilots. We asked him about his sensations during flight. He answers slowly in a low voice, the way it is hard to speak there.

"You almost never get to do anything in the air other than think about what you're doing. You always feel the strength of the plane and it feels like riding a dart.

"But if you look down, you see large green blotches of countryside, the yellows of the city and a large, blue sheet, the sea. Then you lose the notion of speed, and it feels like you're staying still in the air.

"The only time you get to see that is when you can think about something besides the engine."

Llerena blushes, he is really embarrassed about what he is about to say, that's the way this pilot is.

"What I think about is all the people just like me, who are down there doing the most diverse things, while I'm up there alone in that huge space."

Lamas, who is beside him, has quite a lot of grey hair but is much younger than Llerena. He is most impressed by a flight one sunny day:

"I hadn't ever stopped to look at it but a few months ago, I just got the idea to do it...

"That was really impressive. I can't describe it very well, but it really moved me. Around that huge ball of fire is a black circle that is like three thousand times larger than it is.

"The first time I saw it I really felt kind of scared... now every time I fly I stop to look at it. I always try to do so, and when I do, I think about how tiny I am. I feel a strange kind of longing or sadness, something like that."

## THE PIRATES LIVE 90 MILES AWAY

There is a tiny white dot on the radar screen. The operator, with terrifying coldness, speaks through the microphone:

"It is a target. To judge by its speed and height, it is a reconnaissance flight that approaches the coast and if it continues its course it will penetrate east of Havana."

The tiny dot follows its course and a few seconds later the familiar sound of two engines crossed space.

Twenty minutes later the Migs landed. The pilots were Pretus and Benigno. The former, visibly excited, told me of the outcome of the mission.

"It was a very dark night" he pointed to the sky where one lone star was to be seen. "But I managed to sight it, it was an P2V-Neptune reconnaissance plane and as soon as we approached it headed north.

"Too bad it was night, sometimes during the day you can see each other in the cabins and I would've loved to have seen what he did when we were on top of his plane...but in any event, he had to turn tail, it's not right for them to stain the sky."

Then, in a calmer, lower tone, he said, satisfied:

"This is the first time I went out with the possibility of combat. I was always obsessed by that moment. When I was still on the

strip, I felt rather nervous, but as soon as I got the order to take off, I started to act mechanically, as usual, until I landed. That was my combat solo..."

These young men are heroes in silence. They live in an undeclared war. Any night might be their last. Varona, a 24 year-old captain, stressed that hours before:

"Each one of these pilots is worth his weight in gold. They make sacrifices, they work hard, they risk their lives. They have to spend so much time here that many of them hardly have any time for their girlfriends."

"How do they feel about all that?"

"Well, they figure they're parasites because they don't produce anything. The arguments about that were long, but many of them have already come to understand the need for an army...

"When the Yankees come close, they all want to be the first in the air because they know they're to blame for the expenditure of so much human energy and effort on war."

## FASTER AND HIGHER

The desires of our pilots no longer have limits. I've seen one of them stare hard at pictures of Titov, which he carried in his map folder. Maybe inside of six months, he'll be flying an even better interceptor, and maybe, why not, he'll conquer the moon with the Soviets.

That is logical for two reasons. A man who three years ago flew a plane with automobile points and today flies a craft that seems right out of the 21st century has little reason to be surprised.

The other reason is science today. Because of their importance in warfare fighter planes have become highly complex machines in which a single man carries out the work of pilot, navigator, radar operator and gunner.

But all this does not lessen the aviator's faculties. Today he directs the instruments which carry out different functions. Where the human being ends, the human being's machine begins.

As soldiers, they say:

"At Playa Girón we defeated them almost with our bare hands. What aren't those same hands capable of today flying these Migs!"

And as pilots they say:

"Some people say, the good old days were back when Otto Lilienthal lived, when flying was imitating pigeons!"

"But that's a mistake, you have to say, thanks, Otto, for beginning the whole thing...What a great era this is, with humans flying higher and faster than any bird!"

# THE YOUNGEST ISLAND IN THE WORLD

*Cuba*, May 1968

From head to toe, after the boots and the silvery spurs, after the well shaped hat, you see the sunburnt faces of the cowboys who learned to be cowboys in half a year; their faces show nothing of the former office worker or shop clerk; these people can talk to you about the Brahma cow and the technique of "kicking" with the same ease with which they used to pull the cap off a milk bottle.

## ODET AMAT IS BETTER THAN TOM MIX

They are very young. This is in a way an extension of their cowboy games, only they don't carry Colt 44's or Winchester repeating rifles (in their training as army reservists, they practice with automatic rifles) nor are there Apaches or buffaloes. But there are pale faces and mulatto faces and black faces and very black ones and olive ones, like that of Odet Amat, who is the son of an Arab and arrived in Isle of Pines "doing my duty as a member of my organization, the Young Communists." Instead of buffaloes, they have to deal with the dangerous brahma cows ("They're real bad ladies").

Also missing is technicolor. The image of the perpetually smiling cowboy, well-combed, shiny, with a sombrero that never falls off: they've forgotten all that. In the movies no one ever told them:

"Animals can't talk but they feel. The cowboy must learn to understand them, to realize when they need and why they're uneasy" says Odet Amat, who shows off the cattle center where he is the sheriff, sorry that is, the person in charge, and the first secretary of the Young Communist committee in the camp.

Then he introduces me to them: This is Gertrude, this is Sara, this is Miguelina, this is Dorisa, this is Mimí, this is Haydecita, this is Encarnación, until I meet all the Bad Brahma Ladies.

There's one at the end, called Guinea. She's the wildest of the lot, they warn me. Odet smiles: you know, we used to be a bit afraid of her, see? he says and goes up to Guinea and orders her: Stand up, Guinea, and Guinea, without much of a fuss, stands up on her back legs, lifts her back and stares at Tom Odet.

## SOLDIERS OF THE LAND

It is very easy to see a stirring image on any of the roads of the island: battalions of soldiers, without arms, their shirts stained with sweat, working in the planting of citrus trees or picking fruit. In numerical terms, the greatest burden of agricultural work of the island falls upon the members of the Revolutionary Armed Forces. If they are not interrupted by a "combat alarm", the soldiers of Isle of Pines put away their arms preserved with grease and devote several months a year to productive work. The rest of the time is needed for military training and school work (geography, maths, history, grammar). Normally, the soldier-farmers start work at 7 in the morning and stop work at 6 in the afternoon, with brief rests for lunch and snacks. They work for 10 hard hours during which they make their banners snap under the sun.

## NOT A LAGGARD IN THE BUNCH

The lieutenant of the battalion, with his calm, sharp gestures, pushes his hat back and pushes his gun belt, which holds a 7.62, forward.

"City boys are soft, they're not toughened up. After their military service they're different, and if you don't believe me, just ask them" he says.

The day's work is over and the recruits surround the lieutenant. Who's from the city here? he asks, seeking the answer in their faces. At the end of the group is one recruit who hangs back. The lieutenant discovers him and says, aren't you from the city? The recruit says yes. What were you like before military service? asks the officer.

"I was soft" says the kid with a wide, toothy smile in his tanned face. The others burst out laughing. The lieutenant puts his cap and his gun back in place and heads for the canteen, surrounded by the recruits.

## WE'RE THE NOISIEST

I'm a soldier, I'm a gunner. We're into guns and antiaircraft batteries, we're the ones that make the most noise in a war. My name is Félix Rosales and I'm 21 (he's been a recruit for 34 months). These are my buddies: Rey Guerrero, Seferino Tejeda and Osmar Núñez. We four'll soon finish our service with the guns, and besides, we're all from Oriente. Even though my parents are country people, I never worked before planting citrus trees. Where I'm from we plant coffee. Now, we really do a good job. Today, as you see, the weather is tremendous, it isn't all that common in Cuba. It's three in the afternoon and it's cool. The sun is not melting us down the way it did yesterday, and the way it will very likely do tomorrow. As you see, we're planting citrus saplings with the clump of red earth they have stuck to their roots. We stick each one in a hole

and surround it with this kind of earth that is black, grey and blue, because it is drier. I like to see the way the two kinds of earth merge.

## ESTANISLAO MARTÍNEZ
## STONE BY STONE

I'm a rock splitter, I'm in charge of the border of the dam, not just me of course, with the other comrades. There are a lot of us, like in the pyramids. Here your old hangnails really come out. The work is very hard. You load large stones, you cut them and then you place them around the dam like a row of young ladies, so that later on the water won't leak out. But you do earn a bit more and you help to build a work of prosperity that promotes your ideals.

## THE RICHARD SOUNDS CRAZY

I use the Richard bulldozer on the stones, to smoothe over the "mask filter" which is a very important thing in the dam...says the engineer. The Richard sounds crazy. I work with one hand outside and the other on the controls. I do it like a real tough guy. I'm Lenchito, the driver, but my official name is Laureano Lorenzo Cruz, 25. I'm from Pinar del Río, been working as a bulldozer operator for seven years. Besides, my face is covered with dust, like a layer of paint. The dust gets into your pores because of all our work with the stones. I'm always doing dangerous jobs. I don't know if its because I'm not afraid or because I do them well. Anything more? Well ...let me answer that one by saying that when we leave a finished dam, it's even greater than being with women.

## THE GERMAN SKINS A CHICKEN

German Tony Hurber, 71, is skinning chickens in the yard of the worker's canteen at the El Medio-Las Nuevas, where he is an assistant. He has a long white, soft beard.

I arrived in Cuba on a steamship, running away from World War I (ha ha). I saw lots of shooting, and I said, let someone else see World War II. That's just what happened. If I'd stayed over there and got sent to Russia, I would've turned into a block of ice (ha ha). First I was a tailor then an industrial chemist, that is, in Cuba. But the war got me all the-same (ha ha). The July 26 boys, the urban resistance people, ask me to teach them to make powder for their bombs, so I did (ha ha). The police of that criminal killer Esteban Ventura got me and beat me up. I headed for Isle of Pines. I got myself a piece of land here. My wife had already died, she was Victoria García, from Manzanillo. So I just stayed here, not a care in the world. People have to eat here just like any place else and I always have money (ha ha) and a chicken in hand (ha ha). I let my beard grow because it doesn't bother me and that way the mosquitoes and gnats can't get to me. I fought against the Red Army, in Odessa, back in Lenin's day, but communism got me here (ha ha).

The old man has a curly beard and he smokes his cigarettes right down to the end: he's going to singe his beard any day.

## SPAM TIME

In the canteen they begin to eat without standing on ceremony. They make good work of the "chow": chick pea soup, slices of luncheon meat, a sweet potato and cold water. They use a spoon as the universal utensil. They get down the chick pea soup with sips of water and pieces of sweet potato and leave the luncheon meat to the end.

Some of them have a section of women's stocking on their heads underneath the safety helmets. "It's so the stone dust doesn't get into your hair" says one as he eats his spam.

## THE PNEUMATIC HAMMER PEOPLE

The pneumatic drill people really have a hard job. And with danger all around, plus the duster and the noise of the quarry. They drill their way into mountains: "We're going to leave this island flat as a pancake" they say, and in the holes left by their pneumatic hammers they place the dynamite charges. After the explosion, the pieces of mountain are ground up to turn them into building materials. It is a simple change, from mountains into roads or buildings.

"Wherever you are you think of death" (the speaker is Daniel Mofa, 44, a very productive pneumatic drill operator) "only here you think about it a bit more, that's all. Now, you have to keep living and working, you get over fear."

Steel helmets, shelters, a prudential wait after explosions: there have been no accidents. "But not long ago there was a landslide. The big stone hit a mountain ridge and jumped. This black guy turned ashen, the stone hit two meters from him. We gave him the afternoon off because he was really shaken..."

Luis Lay is younger than Mofa, he is 17 and from Havana: "I've been on the Isle for six months, sometimes we work as many as 11 hours a day. This is really a hard job, prof." Lay wears a dirty sack tied at the waist like an apron: "It's to keep from getting so dirty."

Ignacio Riviera, 37, who came from Guantánamo and brought his family of five children and "another on the way", painted his name on his safety helmet. It is painted in green: El Pinito: "that means that I plan to stay here on the Isle, put down roots like a real pine tree."

## THIRTY GUYS ON THE PLAIN

About 30 young men, with adult, hard faces, with laws learnt in the street, surround the teacher on an open plain that doesn't seem to want to have any trees. The teacher looks much younger and sweeter than his pupils; he is reading out of an army infantry manual. He looks like a chaplain reading from the Bible. Some of his pupils have removed their shirts despite the chilly wind that beats against the esplanade of black, stony earth; others listen kneeling, in a very uncomfortable way, with their armpits on the edge of their knees. The teacher is called Rigoberto Fuentes Santiesteban. He is 30 and was born in Santiago de Cuba.

## I ALWAYTH LITHP A BIT

Sonia Aguilera, 16.

I alwayth lithp a bit, I pronounce the "z" and the "c" the way people from Madrid do. I'm from Holguín. I'm in firtht year of junior high. I'd like to thdudy thporth medithine. Tho I'd go to Germany for two yearth. I wath in another thcool but I'm repeating the grade becauth I didn't really thdudy. (She covers her face with her hands to laugh with embarrassment). I like to pick kudthu grath, but I hate to paint.

Reynaldo Méndez, 16.

First year junior high. When I finish I plan to study medicine. I like to operate on mice and look at their insides. That's really interesting. Here I worked in the silo, kudzu grass and citrus. Citrus fruit is good for medicine because I notice doctors always give sick people orange juice. So we future doctors should plant more oranges.

# WHEREIN THE TALE OF A STUBBORN OLD MAN IS TOLD

Jacksonville, fact is the village should still be called Jacksonville in honor of that stubborn old man Atkins Jackson, who reached this coast in 1905 and forced the jungle of brush to retreat under the blows of his hatchet and built his house and populated the southern area with his "blond" last name, Jackson.

And now, silence. We are in a spotless wooden bungalow, drinking tea and speaking with Moddriel Jackson, Atkins's own son. He is 75 and arrived in Cuba at age 11 with his father. Silence, please. Speak, Mister Moddriel:

"You know where Caimán is, south of the South (of Isle of Pines). It belongs to the British Commonwealth. We Jacksons are from Caimán, along with the Rivers, Woodlarks and Yates. Five families, we're all descended from English whalers, tired whalers who decided to stay on Caimán. But Caimán was small and starving so they decided to try their luck to the south of Cuba.

"We arrived on the Wood Lark, that means the name of a bird, it was a 25 ton boat. First we built the houses. Then Papa Atkins said, Let's plant coconut palms, so we planted 20 thousand of them. Then a few years later, there was a blight that wiped out the trees. Let's raise bees, said Papa Atkins, so we did; we had 250 hives and eight to ten honey tanks when the 1926 hurricane swept away everything. Papa walked around the flooded lands and saw three tins floating with a few live bees. Let's begin again, he said. Sure, for all that time, we also fished, little ones. No more whales, was the way Papa Atkins put it.

"Then the Totens arrived and settled at the tip of the peninsula, with the Totens was their daughter Maude, a little girl with blue eyes. In 1915 the Lutheran minister came and we built a new house, a white one, for Maude and me.

"Maude gave me nine children. One died when he was a month old, a really sad tale. The others were strong, they grew up under the sun. Around then the *Gallego* came from Spain he was a very

decent man. My daughter Benys Jackson married the Gallego. That was a funny story: the Gallego came from Spain and married a daughter of the English crown in the most remote corner of Cuba."

That was how Cocodrilo-Jacksonville came into being.

## A TOUGH JOB AND THE MEN WHO DO IT

I arrive at the place of two charcoal makers after a bad journey. The people from the Forestry Enterprise move around the area, cutting down posts, timber and beams to send "out," that is, to the north shore of Isle of Pines. The two charcoal makers are The *Guagüero* (Bus Driver), whose real name is Luis Felipe Moreno, 49, who eats rice, black beans with red pepper, slices of cucumber, crackers and has a kindly face, surrounded by a black beard, and the *Gallego* Hermida, who is Manuel Hermida, and who was born 60 years ago and arrived in Cuba in 1923 and who moves his body from side to side as if he never planned on stopping. Their place has a shack in the form of a hurricane shelter, an upsidedown V, long in the back and covered with palm thatch.

Guagüero and Gallego built a pantry under the roof where thay show off their reserves: jars of mango and guava marmelade, sacks of rice and beans. Their beds are built of flexible twigs with jute sacks by way of matresses. Their stove is a tin drum upon in the middle where they toss in the wood.

"I have a good charcoal wood there" says Gallego.

"How did you two get together?" I ask.

Gallego replies:

"One day we met and we got together and that was it. We accomplished the whole thing with two or three words. Want to make charcoal? Yes, let's do it, and that was that."

Making charcoal is not easy: you need to find a place where there is good wood, thick, straight wood: *guairaje, júcaro, mijo, guao*. A dry, high place where the wood ripens for a month and a half. Then you have to prepare the site for the furnace, then build it and cover it first with a layer of grass, then with a layer of dirt and then burn it, from the center, from up top downward. And as it burns you have to open up air holes and watch over it day and night, a whole week, as if it were a virgin girl. Then when the fire reaches the bottom, you know the charcoal is ready and if a piece of charcoal sounds like iron when you break it, if it splinters like glass, you know it's good charcoal.

After showing me the furnace, Guagüero and Gallego give me some coffee. They plan on leaving the charcoal making game. It's a hard job, one of the hardest anywhere. You spend many a sleepless night, lots of days when you have to wear two shirts and eat under your mosquito net, on account of the gnats, and if the slightest thing goes wrong, the whole thing gets ruined.

"Now there are good jobs all over the place" says Gallego. "It's not like it used to be, I sure have no trouble having five pesos in my pocket."

"We've got the matter under study" says an official of the Forestry Enterprise later. "We're doing some experiments with refractory brick furnaces that the FAO advises. If they turn out to be good, we might get the charcoal makers together in little villages, provide them with a less exhausting life and remove them from their solitary existence."

"Let's go, Gallego" calls Guagüero. "Our wife's waiting for us."

They go off with their swinging gait in the direction of their smoking furnace.

# WHERE THE IMPOSSIBLE COMES TRUE

*Cuba*, January 1966

The counterrevolutionary organization November 30 Movement had a secret plan to be carried out at the end of 1960. The plan consisted of several isolated actions: an armed uprising in the Escambray and an attack on revolutionary leader Blas Roca.

The third aspect of the plan was an attack on the 14th unit of the National Revolutionary Police in Havana. In the operation the assailants would take the US-made weapons of the unit. The November 30 Movement had an abundant supply of 30-06 bullets for Garand rifles and 45's for the Thompson machinegun pistols and M-3's. In the same action they would destroy the Czechoslovak-made M-52 rifles and the T-23 and T-25 light machineguns.

The plan, figured the counterrevolutionaries, would also be a propaganda strike.

For the attack the November 30 Movement would use some of its supporters right inside the 14th unit, among them policeman Manuel Suárez Delgado, 28.

The day set for the operations was precisely November 30. Eight days earlier, on the 22nd, four men knocked on Manuel Suárez's door. It was one in the morning. The four men were members of the G-2, the Department of State Security.

*Adjust your seat belts - Ajústese el cinturón de seguridad - No smoking - No fumar*

A week before I sat down in the passenger cabin of the Iliushin-14. I was flying to Isle of Pines to the south of Havana province. I felt a strange malaise: for the first time I was going to write about people who wanted to destroy the Cuban Revolution. If they had not been captured in time, I mused, they would have killed my comrades, the ones I know and the ones I don't know, possibly the people who are closest to me, and me too.

For months I had heard about a plan to reeducate counter-revolutionary prisoners. The Havana Musical Theater presented a play about life in the prison and the way the inmates opted for reeducation: "Three steps from Freedom." It was directed, acted and written by the inmates themselves. The media commented frequently on the Reeducation Plan and Prime Minister Fidel Castro spoke about the successes scored in the rehabilitation of counter-revolutionaries.

But I thought: could a counterrevolutionary, a class enemy, join the society that he had sought to destroy?

With that thought in my head, the twin engine Cubana Airlines plane began to descend over Isle of Pines: under the left wing, the city of Nueva Gerona and five kilometers beyond, behind some buttes, the round buildings of the "National Penitentiary of Isle of Pines for Crimes against the Security of the State." That is its complete name.[3]

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The prisoners of the Rehabilitation Plan live in the prison and on farms. I visited the Reforma farm. At La Reforma I saw no barbed wire fences, bars or cells, just a cement barrack, without doors of iron or wood: just the hole in the wall and nothing more. Beside the barrack is a large, clean, airy canteen.

[3] It is now a museum, because in Batista times, it housed the imprisoned Moncada attackers, including Fidel Castro.

I ask a man on horseback to go get some prisoners. "Well, I'm one of them" he said. Then I asked for the custodians. "One of them isn't around, he is in Nueva Gerona, but the other is here."

The young blond man with a healthy look and an olive green uniform but no gun introduced himself: "I'm the corporal, I'm in charge of the soldiers here, the guards. Well, I have just one soldier under me, but I am the corporal." At La Reforma there are 150 prisoners and three combatants: the revolutionary instructor, the corporal and his soldier.

Night guard duty is done by the prisoners themselves, without guns. During the day you don't see any prisoners at La Reforma, they go out to the fields to work with the cattle, they come and go alone in a truck driven by a prisoner. Only the cooks stay behind at La Reforma.

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The revolutionary tribunal that sentenced former policeman Manuel Suárez did not try him for treason, which is punished with the death penalty. He was sentenced to 20 years for "subversion and promotion of armed uprisings."

In the final session of the trial the prosecuting attorney said some words that remained in Suárez's memory: "We know that this is a young man who has been confused by enemy propaganda and some day the Revolution will again turn to him."

That was how Manuel Suárez arrived at the prison of Isle of Pines, from which he would emerge at age 45, exactly on July 22, 1977. When the doors were opened at "circular pavillion three" Suárez was hailed by a round of applause from his fellow inmates.

Time went by and he got to know ideologues of the Cuban bourgeoisie, the "standard bearers" for whom he was in prison: Arturo Hernández Tellaheche, Luisito Pozo, Martín Pérez Jr., Lauro Blanco, Caíñas Milanés, Ramón Mestre, personalities, famous

names that he hnew about from the newspapers and who now lived alongside him with the same kind of yellow uniform, sleeping in the same sort of bed."

Suárez learned about the PADA, the Anti-Communist Democratic Action Party, organized by those ideologues; he learned about the counterrevolutionary tribunals that sentenced to death the "traitors" and "enemies" and which would carry out their sentences on the "great day of victory."

For three years he lived with those men, his chiefs. They instilled an idea in him: the US army airborne divisions will get you out of here."

After three years in prison Manuel Suárez sent a letter to the direction of the prison. A few days later, the PADA and the "courts" of circular pavillion three spread the word about a sentence: Manuel Suárez was removed as a traitor from the November 30 Movement and he was sentenced to death.

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Julio Tarrau Castillo, 50, member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Cuba, is a man with a strong character, he is the director of the penitentiary and everyone calls him "the director."

Tarrau constantly plays with a half smoked cigar, at times in his mouth, at times in his hands. Four years working with enemies have given his face a concentrated expression, it is nearly imperceptible but you can feel it.

"Do you want numbers?"

Tarrau's numbers are not cold ones: nearly two thousand inmates who went through the Plan are now at large, working.

The success of the Plan could be measured by those who were recidivists in crimes against the revolution: eight, less than one half of one percent.

On September 26, 1961, ten revolutionaries arrived at the Isle of Pines prison. They were new graduates of the first course of the Osvaldo Sánchez School of Revolutionary Instruction. The ten arrived with a mission: "put into practice a plan of reeducation mapped out the Ministry of Interior."

Two years after it came to power, the Cuban Revolution was preparing to rehabilitate counterrevolutionaries. Only the historic conditions that surround this Revolution made possible the reeducation effort. If Manuel Suárez had plotted against a less strong revolution, or in another era, there would have been no time or opportunity for reeducating him and he would have had to be shot.

Néstor Oger Álvarez's face is that of a kind man nearing 40. He too wears an olive green uniform with a Soviet Makarov pistol, he is one of the 10 instructors who arrived in September 1961.

"We had no experience in correctional work, all we had was our enthusiasm."

The 10 instructors began their work under the direction of Tarrau Castillo, they gathered the first 70 inmates and chose the ones who would serve as teachers.

They upgraded the cultural level of the prisoners and took them to do farm work. The experience with that first group gradually gave rise to the Plan.

First the inmates were sent to farms outside Isle of Pines, then farms were organized right on the Isle.

The new instructors tackled the policy of winning over the bourgeois ideologues who used as arms religion, the US invasion and the coercive atmosphere of the circular pavillions.

The important role in the reasoning of the prisoners is played by the visits and letters of the relatives. There are relatives who urge the prisoners to become rehabilitated, whenever they can they

try to make them see that this is the only way to get out and they mention the examples of former prisoners who are now at large.

These relatives break through the coercive atmosphere of the circular pavillions.

There are also arguments in the opposite direction, especially on the part of wives who have taken on a new lifestyle and would not find their husbands' return convenient, or parents who are heavily influenced by reactionary propaganda. These are the people who urge the prisoner to continue to "fight the communists."

But only time says the last word, the inmate sees the months and the years go by, and the US army does not arrive. He has left just one possibility to keep from serving his full sentence, rehabilitation.

"There's no secret about our work" says Oger "you just have to make these men face up to their own reality."

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Manuel Suárez asked the direction of the prison to admit him in the rehabilitation plan.

He was applauded when he arrived at the circular pavillion, he knew the "big ideologues" with his same uniform and sleeping in the same kind of bed, but with amazement, Manuel Suárez saw that the renowned politician was not his comrade.

Those men Mestre, or Caíñas Milanés or Martínez Sáenz, economically dominated in the pavillion; with the gift packages they received from their relatives, they bought the services of poor prisoners and used them as their servants, to make their beds or fetch a bucket of water to take a bath "because they just couldn't with all the others."

Those men smoked good cigars that they didn't share, they made promises of money for "the big day"; they appointed themselves president or government ministers while they waited for the US paratroops to open the door of the prison.

Manuel Suárez knew about one of PADA's laws: "Within 30 years the land will be handed over to the peasants..." It had a clause "...if the peasants observe good behavior."

Suárez saw that those who had been officers in Batista's army retained their ranks and addressed each other as "colonel" and "captain"; he saw them exchange military salutes and the way they still had ordenances who lighted their cigarettes and prepared their bed.

He also saw distinguished politicians, doctors and lawyers engaging in homosexual practices. He saw the future soldiers of the "Army of Liberation" steal each other's clothes.

Then he witnessed physical clashes, groups arose of different political tendencies, there were fights with inmates beating each other with pieces of iron.

Manuel Suárez and others were accused of being communist because of their more liberal tendencies.

The fights continued but Manuel was struck more deeply by other things: his conceptions were collapsing.

"On the outside I'm a reactionary and here I'm a communist" he thought in the solitude of his cell. "But I'm neither one or the other, so in reality, just what am I?"

The image of the US paratroop opening the prison door made no sense to Manuel Suárez. The paratroop wasn't coming to help him. The same question went round and round in his mind: what am I?

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The rehabilitation plan was organized in three phases.

*First phase*: the inmate voluntarily requests to join the plan. The recalcitrants call the "first phase" people "squares" because of the shape of the building in whinch they live. The inmate receives monthly visits from his relatives, as an immediate advantage, and also has a private monthly visit with his wife in the Codornices motel.

The "first phase" prisoners wear yellow uniforms. When the instructors decide that the inmate is advancing in his thinking and has shown good behaviour, he is moved on to the second phase.

*Second phase*: the second phase inmates do not live in the prison, they live on farms with very light custody and they can go home every 45 days; they are completely free for half a week. For this trip they are given civilian clothes, their fare to their destination (round trip) and some cash for their personal expenses.

The second phase prisoners wear blue uniforms.

*Third phase*: the third phase is release on parole, which is granted at the decision of the direction of the plan and the Superior Council of Social Defense, which take into account the performance of the inmate. In order to obtain release on parole, the prisoner must have served at least a fourth of his sentence and spent over a year in the rehabilitation plan.

The former prisoner on parole has the same rights and duties as other citizens. The Ministry of Interior makes sure that each former prisoner on his exit from prison receives a job and a wage in some production center of the country, although the former inmate may work wherever he desires.

The day they begin to work again, members of the Ministry of Interior introduce the former prisoners to the organizations in their work place and ask them to help as much as possible.

In the first two phases the prisoners take classes in grammar, botany, maths, and history of Cuba, as their only social science course. They are not taught Marxism-Leninism. On the farms the inmates study stock raising, soils and the like.

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Three years of prison led Manuel Suárez to a conclusion: there was no reason for him to be in circular pavillion 3. He did not receive expensive cigars or gifts, he had no servants, he was not homosexual, he had no idea of how to go about writing agrarian laws for the "Congress of the Republic."

The day he reached that conclusion, Manuel Suárez was an ideologically defeated man.

Today Manuel Suárez is in the second phase of the plan. In his visits to Havana he met a woman whom he will soon marry. They will get married at the Reforma farm.

"I see new things" he says with a nervous smile. "I see new things."

Then he adds:

"I was convinced of an idea and for the sake of that idea, I went to prison, in prison I found out that idea was not just. That is very hard, but it is even harder to convince yourself of your mistake."

Manuel speaks of his former chiefs: "I thought they were made of gold but when I scratched them a bit, I found they were pure shit."

He won't be released until July 1977, nor will he be released immediately, but release is just three steps away from Manuel Suárez. He now remembers those words: "We know that this young man was confused by enemy propaganda and some day the Revolution will turn to him."

*"I am satisfied with Mister Mc Conne, the intelligence community, the CIA, the Defense Department..." John F. Kennedy*

I remember the face of an old but very vital man, with each wrinkle appearing as a tense, vibrant muscle. I cannot state his name because he is a member of State Security.

He likes to say this:

"You know, the CIA just hasn't managed to get us. It never has. It has millions of dollars to spend and of all its millions, it uses lots of them against Cuba...but never mind, it can't make it. You know how we defeat them? With empty hands, with bare chests, without money and very often even without transport. As I say, that's how Security defeated the CIA."

The old man is proud of his membership in State Security, and at the end of his words he repeats: "Either you can or you can't, but there's no way of defeating the truth."

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There are heroes in the work of rehabilitation. I can introduce you to the young corporal at La Reforma, Rogelio Martínez, 18. He spent three years in the battalions of Fight against Counterrevolutionary Bandists (LCB) and he has spent a good period of time in the work of reeducation. In the past 20 months Rogelio has not taken leave once while all the inmates he guards go off every 45 days: "There's a lot of work here" says Rogelio.

"When I was 15 and could hardly be seen, I was in the Escambray fighting the bandits. Lots of them are now in prison here and I help them to become reeducated."

Then there is the instructor Marín ("when I see the prisoners released on parole I feel really proud") and we shouldn't forget Manuel Añón Díaz, instructor at La Reforma, a very warmhearted man who makes people be sincere with him.

He tells the following story:

"We went out in the jeep to pick up our lunch, I was with five prisoners. At the curve of dairy number 4, our brakes went and the jeep turned over. The prisoners managed to climb out but I was trapped under the body. At that moment they did not seem to be men who fought against us. They shouted and shoved the jeep to save me, they shouted 'we have to save the instructor, we just have to!' until they succeeded it pulling the jeep off me."

*The main characteristic of the cl 30 M-1 rifle, the Garand is the speed of its mechanical functioning..."*

Pedro Silva Alba had a Garand, you know what a Garand is? This rifle for a long time was the regulation weapon of the United States army. With model two bullets it can reach 3 450 yards and with model one bullets, 5 500 yards.

It weights nine pounds 10 ounces without the bayonet and each magazine can be provided with eight bullets. That was what Pedro Silva Alba had to fight the Revolution during the two and a half months he was up in arms in Matanzas. He also had a 45 pistol and over 200 bullets. But he was caught and sentenced to 10 years. Silva is now in the second phase of the plan, as is Tardío (up in arms in the Escambray) and Angel Pajón Suárez (conspirator) whom the other prisoners nicknamed Bundle of Grass.

"They gave me that nickname because my last name is Pajón (trans: literally, large straw), so the guys say I'm just a Bundle of Grass."

Their stories are similar to that of Manuel Suárez, they are men from working class backgrounds who understood the meaning of class treason in prison. They all have a lot to demonstrate and the Revolution offers them that opportunity.

They know the tale of former prisoner Jacinto Siré who today directs construction projects on Isle of Pines or that of Orestes Pérez Miguel, sentenced to 10 years in 1960 and who today is production chief of Unit 290 of the Flour Enterprise. Then there is Miguel Ángel Alcázar, head of the veterinary department of the Camilo Cienfuegos Special Farm and Cattle Plan on Isle of Pines.

They know a lot, life has made grey hairs appear even on the heads of the youngest.

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Ignacio Pérez tells me he is 35 years old and is serving a 38 year sentence. I ask him why the term is so long and he answers almost inaudibly: "I was a military man in Batista regime and I was charged with mistreatment of prisoners."

Mistreatment of prisoners: the phrase brings to mind the memory of the Batista regime prisons with their floors and walls splattered with blood, ice picks and tongs, torn out eyes and nails, dead eyes in young faces, cadavers left beside little-traveled roads.

Some says that Ignacio Pérez "has a good head for electronic things" and that he is building different machines in the prison; Ignacio joined the first phase of the plan and will be able to study in the new technological school.

See, Ignacio? You mistreated prisoners. One day the roles were reversed and you found yourself a prisoner, but no one beat you up. See, Ignacio, the way human beings act?

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It rained hard in the zone and the muddy earth, with puddles, was very visible. Bundle of Grass said that morning: "I'm going to break a bull" so we headed for the field.

They tied the bull by the neck to the fence. Bundle of Grass settled himself on the bulls back and they released the rope. Come on, Bundle! Hang on there, man!

Digging in with his hands and his spurs, Bundle of Grass clung to the animal who roared, maddened, around the field, kicking all the way. Bundle of Grass kept his word and the tired bull, after a lot of running and leaping, lowered his head and stopped. People shouted: "You did it, Bundle, you won!"

They didn't let Bundle of Grass touch the ground because they carried him on their shoulders and kept him up there for a long time, while they shouted: "This is Bundle, he's stronger than the bull!"

A while later we left the field. Bundle of Grass was panting and covered with sweat. He went up to me and I said to myself, you have to congratulate him.

"Good show, Bundle."

As a symbol of pride, Bundle of Grass puffed out his chest and smiled. Then, without speaking, we kept on walking.

# EARTH WITHOUT AIR

*Cuba*, September 1966

## PRISONER UNDER WATER

Military diver Guillermo Betancourt found himself trapped in a ship sunk in the bay of Havana. The light of his waterproof lamp could not penetrate more than a few inches in the muddy, black bed that surrounded him.

Six months earlier an old 900 ton towboat sank in the lefthand sector of the bay, near the Arsenal docks. As it sank the vessel fell on its port side. The towboat was a danger to navigation in the bay.

The authorities asked for the aid of the ship salvage section of the Revolutionary Navy. The salvage people mapped out a plan: the towboat was sunk due to the countless cracks in its hull. Under the water, the divers would solder those cracks to completely seal the vessel. After that the salvage vessels would remove with hoses all the water inside the towboat until it rose to the surface afloat.

The divers met with difficulties since the first explorations. Due to the action of time the hull had become even more filled with holes. The prow had to be completely rebuilt. The divers worked in dark, filthy water where all the oil spills of the port seemed to have gathered.

"You work to the touch, with the intuition of a veteran diver. The only conversation is the air bubble that is let loose. The only light is that of the soldering equipment."

Diver Guillermo Betancourt, with the rank of ensign, was assigned to enter the towboat: he was to plan a way to seal up the boiler compartment and separate it from the engine room. Betancourt was supplied with an aqualung and two tanks and an undersea lamp. The electric cord of the lamp, covered with thick rubber, would also serve him as his guide to retrace his steps from the sunken ship.

The crew of the diving ship saw how Betancourt disappeared under the blueblack of the waters of the bay. Only the cord of the lamp was tied to the deck.

In his first strokes Betancourt discovered the deck of the towboat in the pale light of his lamp. "Water without light, and up top it's day" he said to himself. A few meters away he found the first porthole. Betancourt went through it. Then another porthole appeared.

The diver projected his light around him: moss covered the steel walls, the silent engines were coated with mud. With a slight movement he tried to reach the boiler room but ended up floating in the same spot. For the second time he tried to advance.

His muscles became tense: he realized that the lamp cord was caught somewhere in that gloomy engine room.

Caught, but where? he said to himself. With his light he looked for the path of the cord but could not see any further than his hands. He felt his legs touching metal and then they sank into the mud. Desperate, he tried to swim but could not move: the cord would not give. His fins dug around in the mud and his lamp grew dimmer.

Where is the way out? he wondered. That was when he realized that he did not know what his position was. With his arms he groped for an exit but came up against metal. Then he felt that his head was sinking into very dense water. Mud, I m head down! he realized.

If he let go of the lamp he would lose his only link with the outside world. His nervousness made him use up fast the air supply of his tanks.

Betancourt lost control of himself. He thought of his comrades on the surface, unaware of what was happening to him. It will be too late when they realize, he thought. Clinging to his lamp, he struck against the sides of his undersea prison.

In the aqualung only a few liters of life remained. His movements grew more desperate; that was when he fully realized what his situation was like. If I could at least cry out, he said to himself. Betancourt bit hard on the mouthpiece of the aqualung to make one final effort: Take it easy or you're going to die! he said to himself.

He relaxed his body for a few seconds and felt better. Then he held his breath and tried to breathe gently. He saw that he could do it, and continued to relax his muscles: easy, there, more, more.

He was floating tranquilly and realized he had regained his self-confidence. He very slowly shone his lamp around his body in all directions. Above his head he found a section of the electric cord that disappeared a few feet away. The porthole! He grabbed the section of cord with his free hand and dropped the lamp. As if he were clinging to a rope ladder he allowed himself to be guided by the cord. He no longer saw anything in front of him but he was gently rising.

An intense, strong flash of light suddenly struck him in the face. He removed his mask and eagerly breathed in the air of the surface. Opposite him, the members of the crew of the diving vessel unconcernedly went about their business. Then he let go of the electric cord.

## WE'RE ANSWERING AN SOS

A dramatic call crosses through space: s-o-s... s-o-s... The coastal stations receive it and ask the endangered vessel to notify its position.

Minutes later in a quiet port in Camagüey the alarm bell sounds in the ship rescue unit. The coastal stations radio the location of the endangered craft while the salvage vessels take to sea.

The boats carry all the necessary equipment: experienced divers, air hammers, diving helmets, aqualungs, dynamite charges, cables, decompression chambers.

In 1960 the Revolutionary Navy created a small group of divers who would be in charge of aiding craft that run aground and other undersea tasks. They recruited men who loved deep sea diving, undersea fishing, treasure hunters and young revolutionaries.

At that time there were just three battered US-made aqualungs. In 1961 they adapted the 04, an old wooden vessel, with a decompression chamber and two diving suits.

That was when a Soviet military mission trained them in undersea work and in the use of the new equipment that would be received.

In 1962 the small group of divers were already transformed into a complicated military organization with tens of men and brand new steel speedboats. The organization received a name: Ship Salvage.

It was headed by First Lieutenant (ensign) and veteran undersea worker, Jiménez Llero, who was the first man in Cuba to use an aqualung and with vast experience "beyond, where the hulls of ships cannot be seen."

The Ship Salvage missions were established: removing vessels that run aground, salvage of sunken ships, repair of hulls, undersea demolition, propeller and rudder changes.

Also established was the organization of the divers:

*Diver station*: three divers (a chief, first diver, another diver).

*Diving brigade*: two stations and a brigade chief (seven men).

*Diving specialist*: heading up a group of brigades.

The Ship Salvage units deal with all types of vessels in danger, cargo, military or passenger "as soon as the SOS goes out over the air."

## NO FASHION IN THE DEEP

Don a frogman outfit: first a black jacket made of thick, nice cloth that covers your whole chest and arms, leaving your hands, legs and head free. Around your waist goes a military belt with two or three lead weights, according to your own body weight.

Load the aqualung on your back as if it were a backpack; on the surface it will be heavy but under water it will be just another part of your body. Then your fins at your feet and your mask, not too tight around your head. The final touch is a stainless steel knife bound to your leg.

Now fall backwards while you hang on to the harnesses of the aqualung and the mask. Breathe deep and look around: the divers are beginning to work.

Now you're under water. Above your head floats the steel belly of the diving vessel. The tranquility of the water and the noonday Cuban sun make for clear water and fine visibility. Twenty five meters under your feet the divers are working, this time with heavy metal and rubber diving suits. They are doing submersion practice.

Cuban divers use the heavy suit only when they have to do electrical soldering. The year round tropical climate enables them to work with the comfortable aqualung equipment. But in their military training they are obliged to master the heavy suit in full detail.

Now you're on your way down: the weights around your waist help you go down without effort. Clouds of fish make way for you. You reach bottom.

The diver walks along the bottom dragging his heavy lead shoes. Two iron shields placed on back and chest keep him on the

bottom. From the round steel diving helmet there emerge two cables up to the surface, the telephone wire and the air pressure conductor.

In modern diving suits the air pressure cable is covered with a steel spiral. That cable is unbreakable. In the old suits, if that hose broke due to some accident, it left the diver without air and he died crushed under the pressure of the water like a cockroach under a boot. The more modern suits are also fitted out in the helmet with a oneway valve that prevents the egress of air accumulated inside the suit in case the cable breaks.

Inside the diving suit is a telephone device that is in permanent contact with the surface. Inside the helmet, ready to be worked with the head, is a small valve that slowly lets out the air accumulated inside.

The Cuban military manuals specify that the heavy suit is the diver's first piece of working equipment. It makes possible long immersions at great depth, unlike the aqualung.

"The aqualung is a light piece of equipment that is used as auxiliary of the heavy gear and to carry out tasks of search, reconnaissance and other simple functions that do not call for much time under water" say the manuals.

With a double tank aqualung you can stay under water two hours, depending on the depth. The aqualung should be used only at 40 to 50 meters, at which depth it uses much more air than at 20 or 30.

Another type of autonomous diving gear exists, the closed circuit outfit. It is strictly for military use because it does not emit columns of bubles the way the aqualung does and the detection of the diver is almost impossible. The closed circuit system works with oxygen and if it is used at more than ten meters deep it can cause the death of the diver due to poisoning.

The Cubans insist: "There's nothing like the aqualung to be the king of the undersea world and master it as you please."

# A QUIET MAN ON BOARD

On board the 012 they say Márquez and it's as if they said anchor or command bridge. The 012 is a long diving boat with a sharp prow that cuts through the water with security. It is built of solid steel and speeds ahead with its powerful engines.

The 012 is the flagship of the Salvage Fleet. It is equipped with radar and a complete series of diving machines. Aboard the 012 the life of a group of young men –the exact number is a military secret– hums along. The young men are divers and crew members, and the oldest is 25. Only the skipper, Ramón González Arazo, and Márquez the cook are around 40.

Whenever the craft ties up in port or stops to operate, it's as if there were a little party. The young sailors leap from all over the boat, as if they were catapulted, and they plunge into the water with fins, masks and undersea shotguns.

Not much time goes by before some of the sailors climb on board loaded with fish. Márquez takes them, carefully scales and guts them and then places them in the refrigerator.

But Márquez hardly speaks. He goes unnoticed in the demanding, active life of the divers. The young men are ingrates: only at meal time do you hear his name over and over again: Hey, Márquez, this needs salt!

With calm steps and controlled gestures he moves among the young men, with a bucket of water, the pot of coffee, clad in his very worn white uniform and ragged apron.

One day, in the middle of the afternoon, the boat weighed anchor for Havana. Except for the duty crew, everyone slept, tired out by the morning's work. Márquez leaned back against a raft beside me and I gave him a cigarette. I asked about his family.

"I'm a bachelor" he replied.

The cool afternoon breeze seemed to revive him. We talked about the sea and its mysteries, and he grew even more animated. Then he said:

"This was in 1960, when we were just a handful. All we had was the 04, an old US minesweeper adapted for this job. It was a bad old boat. The hull creaked and the deck shifted when there were heavy waves. One day we got an urgent message from the port of Isabela. It wasn't an SOS, just to inspect some undersea work. Seven in the morning was the time that we were to reach Isabela. We left fine, no problems, but when we were opposite the bay of Cádiz, we got caught in a heavy sea.

"A heavy sea is bad and so was that damn boat. The sky and the sea were black. The rays of lightning struck nearby and the water was low and fell from above. The boat moved desperately like a drowning man. It got its bow out and plunged down again, the stern lifted and then dropped. That's the heavy, a heavy sea is and the rotten old boat creaked all over the place. Ensign Arazo gave the order to anchor behind the lighthouse of the bay of Cádiz and wait out the storm there. But the maneuver was impossible. The lighthouse disappeared every so often and we heard the waves crashing on the rocks. The ensign decided to head out to sea with maneuver speed, that is, the minimum speed. We set our engines at three miles speed. Early in the morning the rain continued. The ensign calculated that we were opposite Isabela and ordered us to head in towards the shore. I was near here, hanging on to that rope. Below there was a very seasick man, a new guy name of Juan Francisco. He went up on deck for some air. He was less than three meters away from me. He looked for a rope to hang onto. The wave came from starboard and slid across the deck, taking Juan Francisco with him. He looked at us in utter amazement from the water. He lifted his arms and tried to swim. For a moment his body sank. I looked at the spot and waited to see his head reappear. I waited for over ten minutes. The sea was very rough and that shitty boat took ages in its moves. The boys tied on ropes to look for him. At breakfast time I made a full ration of cups of milk. They were all full. Now, every morning, there's one extra cup. At times I look at the sea and wonder where Juan's body ended up."

# UNDERSEA SIGNAL CODE

The divers and their comrades on the suface have two methods of communication: the telephone inside the diving suit and the "code pulls" with the guideline that links the diver to the surface.

If the work is being done with aqualung the guideline is the only communication method.

For example:

– A strong pull.

≈ A group of continuous tugs.

≡ Pressure on the cord.

These communications are inviolable both under the sea and on the surface.

From boat to diver:

– How are you?

– – We're giving you more air.

– – – Get out of the water (compulsory compliance).

≈ Stop, don't move, don't go up or down.

≈ ≈ Proceed

≈ ≈ ≈ Stop where you are, another diver is heading for you.

– ≈ Turn right.

– – ≈ Turn left.

From diver to boat:

– I'm fine, I'm on the bottom.

– – More air.

– – – Get me out (compulsory compliance).

– – – – I've got a lot of air, reduce it.

– – – – – Emergency alarm. Get me out.

≈ Don't lower or raise me.

≈ ≈ Continue lowering me.

≈ ≈ ≈ I'm caught, send another diver to get me loose.

– – ≡ Send a rope.

– ≡ Send tools.

## PRESSURE SURROUNDS YOU

You already feel free. You realize you can breathe under water and all this new world is yours. You can go anywhere with a simple movement of your fins. Now you want to go up and down, see and touch everything. You are a child who is learning how to "walk" all over again. Right now death swims beside you.

Before immersion you fulfilled the safety rules: you revised your gear and waited two hours after eating. You learned the duration of the aqualung, you washed your mask and now you

breathe in a relaxed way. But death follows alongside you if you do not know about the ailments that attack divers, their causes and how to prevent them.

The three most common are decompression disease, barotrauma of the lungs and nitrogen poisoning, although there are 14 undersea diseases in all.

In almost all cases the diseases take place in struggle with the worst enemy of undersea man, the pressure that surrounds him. As the diver descends to the sea bottom, water wields greater pressure on him.

The pressure air he receives from the surface or carries on him in his aqualung keeps him from being crushed to death because it conditions his body with the air he needs at that depth. The depth limit with the aqualung is 50 meters although divers have reached 90 and 100 meters in "almost favorable" conditions.

The Frenchman Fargues and the North American Hoop died at 120 meters. In that attempt Hoop disappeared in the depths. The Italians Falco and Casare succeeded in returning, alive, from 132 meters.

The records have not had any important practical results since after 70 meters undersea work is virtually out of the question due to the lack of visibility and the high concentrations of gas.

After 50 meters, using chemical methods, the mixes of respiratory gases are altered to guarantee the life of the diver. In missions at great depth the diver must use the classic suit of iron and rubber.

## BAROTRAUMA OF THE LUNGS:

It is manifested in bloody foam in the mouth, a cough and a bluish color in the face. The cause of the ailment is the sudden change of pressure in the lungs, which tears away lung tissue and blood vessels.

Barotrauma is prevented by slowly expelling the air during ascent and making sure not to rise too fast.

## NITROGEN NARCOSIS:

Most of the time victims do not realize they suffer from narcosis, so they die from it. The diver who is attacked by narcosis feels fine and cheerfull as if he had just downed a bottle of good wine. At that point he may well feel like bestowing his aqualung upon the fish or lying down to sleep on the ocean bottom, but he is doomed.

Narcosis comes about after 50 meters due to the alteration of brain cells with nitrogen gas (sensation of being drunk).

The way to prevent narcosis is not to descend over 50 meters unless you use a mixture of helium with oxygen instead of air.

## DECOMPRESSION DISEASE:

The "Bends" or decompression disease is the most common ailment of divers. It takes place due to sudden ascent to the surface after a long underwater stay or a very deep dive.

The diver who submerges receives a pressure that is steadily increased. His body quickly adapts to that increase, but this is not the case with the rise to the surface. The diver must stop on his way up to get his body *acclimatized* to the waters of lesser pressure. These are known as *decompression stops*.

The stops are set forth in a decompression table that indicates that number of stops and minutes according to depth and length of time under water.

Here are two examples:

If the diver descends 20 meters and stays there for 110 minutes on the ascent he should stop at three meters and decompress for 13 minutes.

If he goes down 55 meters and works at that depth for 34 minutes he should make two stops on his way up, the first at seven meters, where he will decompress for 27 minutes, and the second at three, for 28 minutes.

In all cases the diver must not arise at a speed of more than 25 feet per minute. Breaking any of the rules of decompression means getting the "bends" which is manifested in loss of control over the nervous system: paralysis, fainting and vomiting.

Decompression disease comes about because of the formation of gas bubbles in the blood and tissues of the body. If the disease is not cured in time and the diver survives, his body will become curved like a bow and he will suffer from pain and discomfort for the rest of his life.

The decompression chambers installed on the ship salvage units guarantee the lives of their men. In case of the bends, the diver is placed inside the chamber to be decompressed.

## I CAN'T GO ON, I CAN'T SEE THE BOTTOM

Sailor Pablo Lambert, with the rank of corporal, descended 55 meters with his heavy diving suit and helmet right off Havana. Date: May 4, 1966. Mission: training maneuver in deep diving.

Lambert touched bottom with his steel shoes and began to walk towards the edge, that is, the first step of the insular shelf.

Outside his helmet he saw the sandy bottom punctuated with sharp rocky formations. The scenery of Cuba's first undersea step extends in large masses of white sand and valleys and mazes of yellow rock.

Opposite Lambert the seascape stopped: a few inches from his iron feet the "solid ground" disappeared to make way for a deep abyss of blue green water. He radioed to the surface:

"I'm fine. I can't continue. I can't see the bottom."

From the diving boat the radio operator told him "Come back." Lambert decided to begin his return and headed for the rest zone when a mighty force pulled him toward the abyss. He tried to keep his balance. An involuntary exclamation reached the surface: "What's wrong?"

The men on deck looked around the vessel, the radio operator didn't know what to reply. A strong breeze began to drag the boat out of the zone, which is known as "canto del beril." Under water, diver Lambert was dragged by that uncontainable force. Finally there was a sharp tug and the 012's anchors cut loose from the bottom.

Lambert continued his battle against the current. His heavy suit was like a pingpong ball. He managed to maintain his balance with a superhuman effort. Inside his suit he sweated heavily and his aching muscles did not want to respond.

Before him saw the blurred shape of a rock and tried to reach it with a leap. If I could only reach it and hang on, he said to himself. The rock and the sandy bed disappeared before his eyes. "Lambert, how are you?" they asked from the boat but the diver didn't hear.

On the surface, the radio operator insisted: "Lambert, 012 here, respond, respond. How are you?" The radio man covered the microphone with his hand and said "He passed out."

A blow went round the deck of the vessel and the crew members surrounded the silent telephone. The skipper pointed to a sturdy sailor with might arms. "Manuel Pérez" he said.

"Get your aqualung ready."

Lambert against saw the rock ahead of him and gently tried to approach. "I think I passed out" they heard up on deck. He was pleased when his hands touched the rough surface of the rock, which he hugged hard. "I'm hanging onto a rock right on canto del beril."

Manuel Pérez stopped a moment on the immersion ladder. The skipper said "For an aqualung 55 meters is dangerous but there's

no time for anything else." Pérez jumped from the ladder and quickly gained some depth. In his hand was a long rope to tie to the diver to bring him up.

Forty meters later Manuel realized he needed to stop for a moment. He didn't know where he was going. He had to think. He was breathing with difficulty and he seemed to have rarefied air in his chest.

For the second time Lambert passed out but his arms still hung on to the rock. He came to again and muttered a few words. From deck they told him to take it easy. Lambert didn't reply.

"He's out again" said the radio operator.

The aqualung diver tried to get his bearings in the blue mass surrounding him. He went down a bit more and his knees stuck in the bottom. Fifty meters, he said to himself. He looked around but saw no sign of Lambert. He decided to swim a bit and explore. Opposite him were two cables, one red and the other black. He grabbed them and tried to pull them toward him, but they did not move.

Lambert once again came to, still clinging to the rock. Opposite him he saw the form of an aqualung diver who was swimming guided by his air and telephone cables. Lambert gestured to him to stop and asked the surface "How came you sent someone to rescue me? He shouldn't be here with the aqualung, we're both going to die."

The skipper took the telephone: "Lambert, Lambert, this is Arazo, this is an order." Below, Lambert struggled with the aqualung diver and tried to keep him off. "Lambert, this is an order." With a quick movement, the aqualung diver got behind Lambert and placed the rope around his chest and then tied it with a secure knot.

The aqualung diver pulled three times on the rope and motioned upward to the diver with his thumb. Lambert passed out again. From deck the radio operator said "Here you come." Lambert did not hear those words but he was gently rising.

# THESE ARE MY SEAWOLF CUBS

The sharp prowed 012 gently rocks in the Cuban midday. It is anchored. Under its hull the military divers work feverishly but without sweating.

A small man with thick glasses moves about on deck, with a stethoscope around his neck and a black bag in his hand. Doctor Castellanos wears a white coat above his olive green uniform fatigues. He is a man who knows all the seas and all the people of the sea know him. "The doctor is a real menace under water, he knows how to feed sharks bait with his hand" say the veteran undersea fishermen.

But Castellanos' daring is based on strict safety rules. He is like a father on board who watches out for compliance with all the safety measures. He is a specialist in undersea physiology and always has at hand a good piece of advice or some fascinating tale about hunting a school of sharks. "...And the way I like to do it, no aqualung, just my own lungs." Further on, the sailors are on duty on the bridge and at the radar. One sailor waits alertly beside the radio "in case there's an SOS." The compressors and the compressed air tanks work without letup. The aqualungs are lined up on deck.

Arazo, the skipper, inspects and moves about from one place to another. "He's the most seaworthy of all the seamen" his men say about him. "And this is the most seaworthy of all boats" he says of his 012.

Arazo lights a slightly damp cigarette. He shows off the 012 with his open arms. He observes the young divers who submerge near the stern. "These are my seawolf cubs" he says.

# BETTER TO SEE ONCE THAN HEAR 100 TIMES

## INTERVIEW WITH ANASTAS MIKOYAN

*Revolución y Cultura*, May 1978

*–When did your first hear about the Cuban revolutionary process?*

–As you may well imagine the reports from the news agencies on the civil war that had begun in Cuba reached Moscow in 1957 and 1958 and I was one of the readers. However that information was fragmentary and rare. It was hard to get a clear idea about what was really going on, much less of the political program put forward by the rebel forces headed by Fidel Castro. Besides, we often read about military actions between different political tendencies and even between groupings that were simply part of the enemy, that is, we heard a lot about *violence*.

"So, it wasn't until the second half of 1958 that people in Moscow began to get the idea that something much more serious was happening in Cuba. I mean, the agrarian reform and other measures. But in January 1959 I had the opportunity to see for myself the way the Rebel Army entered Havana led by Camilo Cienfuegos and Ernesto Che Guevara, the way the people hailed their leader Fidel Castro, the way the Batista cutthroats received their deserved punishment. No, certainly not, I wasn't in Cuba, I was in the United States, visiting different cities. What happened was that after holding a number of meetings with business executives, political personalities and journalists, after conducting a sharp polemic with

them on different aspects of international life, on socialism and capitalism and many other things, every afternoon, to be precise, at two o'clock, I sat down in front of the television to hear about the news from Cuba. Later on, throughout 1959, back in Moscow, we read with interest the reports on the first transformations being carried out by the new government in favor of the people. But even so, we still new very little about what was going on in Cuba.

*–When did you decide to make your first trip to Cuba?*

–In November 1959 I was in Mexico for a big Soviet exposition that had opened there. My stay in Mexico was my first direct contact with Latin America. The government of López Mateo gave us a very warm reception and the possibility of touring the country.

"We had traditionally maintained friendly relations with Mexico since the twenties when our countries experienced victorious revolutions. I think that in addition to the mutual sympathies between the Mexicans and the Soviets, the purely political interests of the Mexican State plays a role, even personalities of the bourgeoisie, who are very far from socialist ideas, feel the heavy hand of the northern neighbor. In order to withstand the pressures of that neighbor Mexico needs broad international contacts and collaboration with other countries, to a large extent with the socialist countries.

"Mexico was the first Latin American country that agreed to receive the Soviet exposition, which earlier had been in the United States, thanks to an agreement between the USSR and the USA for an exchange of expositions. So, these are some of the reasons for the hospitality and attention I received as head of the Soviet delegation.

"I have the warmest memories of that trip, my meetings with the Mexicans, their cordial, open character, their joyous customs, the songs of their *mariachis* and many other details, for instance, I remember my birthday, November 25, to be exact, the night of that day, I was awakened by music at the foot of my window: the *mariachis*, I was really touched.

"Besides all that, my trip to Mexico played a role in speeding up my getting to know something about Cuba. A representative –unfortunately, I can't remember his name– of the Revolutionary government flew from Havana to Mexico City to see me, in the company of Alexander Alexeev, who at the time was in Cuba as the representative of the Union of Associations of Friendship with Other Countries. The Cuban envoy handed me on behalf of Fidel an invitation to move the whole Soviet exposition to Havana and for me to visit Cuba for the opening. The idea was to do all that right after the exposition was closed in Mexico. Needless to say I began to question Alexander Alexeev about what was going on in Cuba and the kind of people that the leaders of the Revolution were.

"I got the absolutely clear idea that I had to accept the invitation. In Moscow they backed that idea, and Fidel's envoys returned to Havana with an affirmative answer. However, after that the Cuban government decided it was better to postpone the exposition and my visit. It turned out that if I visited Cuba right after Mexico the trip would coincide with an international activity of the Catholic Church that would be held in Cuba. Alexeev once again flew to Mexico to brief me on these factors: All you have to remember that we did not have diplomatic relations and that in fact there were no official communications channels. After many years went by, he told me he had gone to see me with a certain amount of concern; he was afraid that as soon as I heard about the proposed change in plans, I would say, well, if they just extended the invitation, how come you're suggesting a postponement? But I immediately realized that the Cuban leaders were right. Besides, it was really difficult to transport and move the exposition in such a short time. So, we agreed to move the displays, we would get everything ready and hen I would fly out for the opening, but from Moscow. And that was what we do.

*–Your presence in Cuba early in 1960 was the first step in the establishment of ties of friendship between the Soviet revolution and the Cuban revolution. What do you recall about that trip?*

–Our IL-18 plane set off for Cuba at the end of January, 1960. That was the first flight and we still were not aware of the fact that it would launch an air bridge between our countries. Before and during the flight I read about Cuba, what little I was able to get at the time. I even read some books by Hemingway, among them the ones that dealt specifically with Cuba. But what I wanted the most was to find out about what was going on there. I remember a leaflet by a Soviet writer about Cuba. As I read it I came up with disagreements with the author. There was, I felt, a contradiction between the facts he mentioned and his views and commentaries. The writer spoke of the agrarian reform and formulated critical observations about the lands of the latifundia. He said they hadn't been distributed to the people who worked them but had gone into large state farms.

"I realized that the problem was being solved correctly from any standpoint, economic, political or social. The author's criticism was purely abstract, based on a mechanical comparison with the countries where the land had to be distributed to leaseholding peasant farmers in order to integrate them in the revolution, although in any event, it had to be decided later how to unify those lands to turn them into large holdings. I was really impressed with the wisdom of the people who carried out Cuba's agrarian reform. What was the sense in distributing the land among the wage earners of the large estates? The large holding is always more efficient than the small one, especially when sugar production is involved. Wage workers are not used to having a plot of land, so why promote the habit? Why create a new class of small rural owners? So I began to have a feeling of respect for the leaders of the Cuban revolution even before I met them.

"One morning early in February 1960 our plane approached Cuba. When we landed and the plane stopped opposite the terminal, I saw through the window a lively throng that filled the space between the building and the plane. There in the midst of the crowd were Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, along with other leaders of the revolution: we plunged into the throng of people.

"The usual protocol was lacking and I recalled the years of my youth, the first years of our revolution, and the natural way in which we ourselves behaved in such situations.

"A short time later we began a tour of the country. We decided to use a helicopter and Fidel himself chose the route, he just signalled the pilot where to go. He didn't need a map. Cuba was down there and he knew every corner...it was an unforgettable trip. We saw tobacco zones of Las Villas, Laguna del Tesoro, Isle of Pines, Santiago, Camagüey and other wonderful spots. I hardly need say how much I learned and how I came to understand Cuba and its revolution.

*–What is your assessment from the political standpoint of the development of the relations between the two countries?*

–The development of the relations between Cuba and the USSR glooms as a brilliant example of working class internationalism, of fraternal cooperation between two countries. One carried out its revolution 60 years earlier and the other became the first free territory in America. It would be hard to underestimate the theoretical and political significance of the victorious Cuban revolution for the entire contemporary world. The influence of this revolution has been projected not only in the countries of Latin America that have strong similarities with Cuba but in the developed capitalist countries. Of all the accumulation of factors that could be mentioned in connection with the significance of the Cuban revolution, I would mention the fact that it demolished the theory of "geographical fatalism." Socialism appeared on the scene in the western hemisphere, habitually regarded by imperialism as its back yard...

"Today the Republic of Cuba is in the front ranks of the battle for socialism, national liberation and peace throughout the world.

"All this makes us very happy. We Soviets feel pleased and even proud when we hear Fidel Castro say that the victorious advance of the new popular, socialist Cuba would have been impossible without the fraternal cooperation of the Soviet Union.

*–How do you asses this from the personal standpoint, in view of your direct participation in these events?*

–Above all you must take into account that I was just a representative of my country who fulfilled his duty as a communist. I am very happy that destiny has taken me to you on the Island, that I realized I was seeing the dawn of a socialist revolution, that I knew the people, the heroes and many ordinary people, that I knew about many matters pertaining to the defense of the sovereignty and the construction of the new society. Such memories can never be erased. I saw the Cubans in days of triumph and in days of danger. Frankly I admire their bravery, sacrifice, determination and spirit, just as I admire them for their sincerity and simplicity in their relations, and for their *joie de vivre*. As I said, I was fulfilling my duty as a communist and as I got to know Cuba and its people, I became filled with a mounting sentiment of profound personal satisfaction at having been able to be with them, and even when far away, useful to them in their struggle.

"Since the first days of our talks with Fidel Castro, Ernesto Che Guevara, Raúl Castro, Carlos Rafael Rodríguez and other leaders, we studied the prospects of cooperation between our countries. This referred mainly to our purchases of Cuban sugar and from there on to commercial relations in general. The question was extraordinarily important for the Cuban economy in its entirety, because US imperialism was already using against Cuba the weapon of the quota, which was supposed to strangle the Isle of Liberty. We studied this matter even before the end of my first stay and we signed the first trade agreement in our history.

"In addition we agreed to establish diplomatic relations, which came about in May 1960.

"In the years that followed, problems constantly arose in regard to economic, scientific-technical and military cooperation, an area under my responsibility as first vicepresident of the Council of Ministers and member of the Politbureau. It is impossible to speak about all that in just a few words: just listing them would take up too much space.

"I'll go into just one memorable moment: the autumn of 1962, when I again arrived in Cuba in connection with the 'Caribbean missile crisis.' On my way to Havana I stopped off in New York, where I met with UN Secretary General U-Thant, Adlai Stevenson, who headed the US delegation in the United Nations, and John J. McCloy, assigned by President John F. Kennedy to lead the talks on the crisis. That historic moment is memorable not only because it enabled the ruling circles of the United States to take a look into the depths of the abyss and realize the danger of their adventurous actions. Those ruling circles also became convinced that Cuba was an independent state, prepared to defend its sovereignty with courage and dignity. And while I was in New York I felt very satisfied when Fidel Castro put forward his five points as the basis for any future talks with the United States.

"In my remarks in the airport in New York before leaving for Havana, I unreservedly supported those points which to be sure, 15 years later stand as a reasonable, constructive and principled program. In the course of our talks with Stevenson and McCloy, I made every effort to convince the Washington administration that no one would be able to drive a wedge between Cuba and the Soviet Union and that in the relations between the United States and Cuba there was no longer room for inequality, diktat and pressures.

"And so, nearly three years later, I once again saw the marvelous Isle of Liberty and met with my friends the leaders of the Cuban revolution. With Fidel Castro we studied in detail the different aspects of the crisis, the prospects for the development of international relations, the ways for Cuban-Soviet collaboration to develop. I was able to see all the advances that had taken place. I saw Soviets transmit to the Cubans their experience in the different spheres of the economy.

"I also saw the Soviet military personnel ready to fight alongside the Cuban people, shoulder to shoulder, without any hesitation.

"Those days were of great concern to all of us, but friendship shows it is indestructible when it withstands all the tests.

"The expression 'a friend in need is a friend indeed' is applicable to our countries. The Soviet people prepared to defend Cuba by creating an insurmountable barrier in the way of the aggressors. Cuba was prepared to perform feats and to sacrifice itself for the cause of freedom and justice.

"As you can see, my two visits to the Isle of Liberty left me with brilliant, indelible impressions and awakened in me feelings of respect and fraternity.

*–What can you say about your friendship with Fidel Castro?*

–I regard Fidel Castro as one of the most brilliant people that destiny has enabled me to meet in many decades.

"Since the first moment of our meeting I realized that he was an exceptional man, who didn't fit the patterns of the statesmen I knew. And I've gotten to know a lot of foreign statesmen...In a short time I realized that Comrade Fidel possessed the revolutionary's unwavering will, singular integrity and personal honesty, a great intelligence and a genuine, very personal worldview. Since our first talks on the courses of revolution, the international situation, Marxism, I realized that he was a man of profound judgement, with a formidable education and who thought in a very clear and logical manner, but who at the same time knew how to listen with attention and accept the arguments and considerations of others. Naturally, all that made me very favorably disposed towards him.

"During my first visit to Cuba we met almost daily for hours and hours in the most diverse situations: at the table for talks in Havana, on the beach of a tiny island in the Caribbean with sand as white as snow, at a meeting at a rice mill in Camagüey, at Laguna del Tesoro with our fishing gear in our hands, at the new construction sites in Santiago, among the tobacco farmers in Pinar del Río, on top of Mount Turquino and on a cattle ranch on Isle of Pines...You will agree with me that in such circumstances, nine days are enough to size a person up and get to know him thoroughly, to feel at ease with him and feel trust, liking and respect.

"Of course, after that we met again many times: again in Havana in November 1962, then in Moscow, during Fidel's first visit between April and May 1963. He visited me at home then. I remember how my children and grandchildren were thrilled at seeing the legendary revolutionary hero and actually speaking with him. They carefully kept all the pictures we took then.

"All those meetings and the subsequent ones enhanced still further my respect, good will and friendship towards the leader of the Cuban Revolution.

*–What memories do you have of Ernesto Guevara?*

–I met him the first day I arrived in Cuba. He took part in many important talks I had with the Cuban leadership. I especially remember my talks with Fidel and Che on Mount Turquino, near Santiago, about the paths of the revolution in the country, socialism and other vital matters. Che's remarks were characterized by his understanding of the many difficulties and perils that would loom up before the Revolution, as it grew deeper, and at the same time, by his determination to surmount them.

"In Che's personality, as you may well imagine, his personal, purely human qualities captivated me: the fascination he wielded over the people around him, his utter integrity, his rectitude, his absolute honesty. But naturally those were not the qualities that determined my attitude towards him. The main thing was his iron, I would say inflexible, conviction in the rightness of the course he had chosen, loyal to the interests of the workers. And he was a genuine internationalist, clearly not only as a result of his education and life experience but also because he was a revolutionary through and through, and one determines the other.

"Total dedication to the Revolution was his central passion, his happiness, his supreme ideal. The sense of revolutionary honor, of revolutionary duty, came naturally to him and so he did not avoid difficulties and dangers, on the contrary, they attracted him. Due to his intrepid nature he was always ready to give his life for the ideas in which he believed. But at the same time there wasn't any ostentation, bragging or visible audacity in him, idle talk was alien to his

nature. All his words, gestures, deeds and actions were permeated with sincerity, modesty and simplicity.

"You realized that this intellectual, this 'bookworm,' was not an ivory tower type, some kind of erudite hermit. He loved struggle, combat, audacious deeds. But he was not just a Don Quijote who dreamt of fighting windmills and imaginary enemies. His enemy was very concrete, and it is called imperialism.

"For Che Guevara the fight against imperialism was a matter of revolutionary honor, of revolutionary duty.

"Was Che a romantic? Of course he was, but he was a revolutionary romantic. Remember Lenin's words: 'it goes without saying that we cannot do without the romantic aspect. It is better for there to be too much of it than too little. We have always sympathized with revolutionary romantics, even when we have not been in agreement with them.'

"We spoke a lot with Che, and frequently we argued. He was characterized by his impatience, his frankness, his faith in the astonishing strength of the revolutionary act, his total rejection of compromises in struggle. In a certain sense, all revolutionaries especially when they're young have those shortcomings. For many of us, only life experience, including not only successes but also failures, has brought us sobriety in our judgement; revolutionary passion becomes disciplined only under the effects of life experience and that enables us to muster the forces needed to launch into combat again. The very rich experience of the Great October Socialist Revolution, of our Soviet State, the experience of the international communist movement all bear witness to this.

"We talked about all this with Che Guevara. In many aspects he agreed with me, but in many others he held a completely opposite opinion.

"Once I kidded him, saying the name Che was really right for him, since in Armenian it means NO. He laughed with delight. Getting Che Guevara to change his mind was very difficult, although

he had no easy time trying to persuade me. Only life, the development of the revolutionary process itself could bring about the necessary corrections in our discussions, show where he was mistaken and where I was mistaken. But our debates were between two people with the same ideas, not between adversaries. Both of us were communists and that determined the respect in which we held each other and the friendship between us.

"I'd like to talk about my impressions of the relations between Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. We were together many times, occasionally just the three of us and the interpreter. That's why I had the opportunity to assess the singular friendship between them, characterized by an absolute trust and mutual understanding. The characters of these two Cuban revolutionaries differed considerably. But the temperamental, fiery, enthusiastic Fidel and the apparently calm, serene Che got along perfectly, they greatly admired each other, perhaps because of their different qualities. I read the final pages of Che's Diary with my heart filled with grief. I imagined what the last days of Che's life must have been like. So few words in those pages and so much drama in the revolutionary combats!

"Unlimited admiration is awakened by the courage, determination and readiness to fight to the end that fill the pages of the *Diary*. This paints him even more clearly as an unwavering fighter, even in the face of defeat, since it was the defeat of a guerrilla detachment in which he had placed great hope. Men like Che do not die in vain.

"After their death, they remain in the ranks and continue serve as source of inspiration with their example for more and more new fighters in the struggle for communism, for the liberation of all humanity from exploitation and oppression. The shining image of the communist Ernesto Che Guevara will live forever in the memory of the people, in the hearts of his friends and comrades in struggle and of all those who knew him.

*–We hear you're working on your memoirs now. What will they be like and how long?*

–Working on my memoirs now in the twilight of my life is my chief occupation. Before I didn't have time to write or take notes, nor did I think about writing my memoirs, although I certainly am not bragging about it. On the contrary, I greatly admire people who write without waiting for retirement. For instance, the noted novelist and journalist Marietta Shaguinian once told me that since she was eight years old, she's been writing in her diary and she's now ninety!

"However, the files that remain and the different documents of the period of my activity in the Party and the State to a considerable extent help me overcome that difficulty.

"The thing that first inspired me to write my memoirs was the desire to tell about Vladimir Ilich Lenin, my encounters with him, the ideas and sentiments that awakened in me and what I observed of his activity in the Party congresses and plenums. That was the way the whole thing started.

"After that I worked on the chronological account of my experiences. The chapters of the future book have first been published in magazines and newspapers. *Along the Road of Struggle* is the first volume and it covers from my childhood up to 1920. Besides the Russian edition, it was published in French in Moscow, in Armenian in Yerievan and then appeared in Bulgaria, Hungary, Japan and other countries.

"The second volume, *Early in the Twenties*, came out in 1975, and its title indicates the period covered. Now I'm finished volume three, which reaches 1937. I've published in newspapers and magazines memoirs about a number of comrades in arms and friends: Ordzhonikidze, Dzerzhinsky and others. In the *Magazine of Military History* three articles were published on certain moments of the work of supplying the front and the rear guard in the years of the Great Patriotic War, that was my responsibility as a member of the State Defense Committee: it deals with the creation of the "Reserve Front" with the aim of achieving the decisive supremacy of the forces that waged the battle of the Kursk Salient, which conclusively altered the course of the war; and the supplying of the heroic defenders of Leningrad, who withstood a 900 day blockade. There

still remains a lot that I'd like to write about, but I don't have time. My plans for the future naturally include my memoirs on my trips to Cuba and everything connected with the first years of the Cuban Revolution.

*–When did you start your political life? When did you join the Party?*

–What was it that made me a professional revolutionary, after being a student in a religious seminary? Mainly, the reality that surrounded me and books. I began to meditate about the origin of life on earth and I became an atheist. I began to look in the books of the revolutionary democrats, the utopian socialists, in the history of the French Revolution the answers to social inequality, about the fight against it, and I became a revolutionary.

"The waves of the revolutionary movement reached our seminary in 1911 and 1912, when I was 16 or 17. I organized a political circle there. We began with the reading of Kautsky's book *The Economic Doctrine of Karl Marx*, then we studied works by Bebel, Plekhanov and finally, Marx and Engels. In 1914 our circle became the promoter of a meeting with representatives of similar groups in the city of Tiflis. At that time, a comrade of mine who was somewhat older, Shaverdian (I later found out he had been a Bolshevik for some time) gave me Lenin's book *On the Development of Capitalism in Russia*. Soon the police searched my house, they also had an order for my arrest. Fortunately I wasn't home at the time and my friends had time to warn me, as I was on my way home, that I had to hide, which I did.

"At the end of 1914 I volunteered, as did many others, to go to the front. It was necessary to stop the advance of the Turks, who were machinegunning the peaceful population in the territory of Armenia. I took part in combats, then I got malaria and had to be hospitalized. Then I returned to Tiflis, arriving there transformed from a boy into a man.

"Shavardian saw that this was the case and gave me a program of the Social Democratic Party (of the Bolsheviks), Lenin's book *What Must Be Done?* and other writings by Lenin. After that I joined with full awareness in the activity of the Party, which was in the underground, and in November 1915 I was formally admitted.

"In December 1916 for the first time I published an article in the newspaper, although with blank spaces because the censors removed everything that referred to the programmatic principles that appeared in the polemical article.

"The revolution of February 1917 gave a mighty impetus to the revolutionary movement in the Caucasus. I remember how we explained to the soldiers the meaning of this event and convinced them of the need for Russia to pull out of the war.

"I tried to reach the crucial place in the struggle. I offered to go to Bakú when I found out that the leader of the Bolsheviks in that industrial city, Stepan Shaumian, asked to have a person sent there who would be able to conduct propaganda and agitation among the Armenian workers. I got to Bakú in the spring of 1917. My meeting with Shaumian, my work in the main commune of Bakú, prison, the threat of being shot by the English, the defense of the city against the advance of the Turkish troops, my trip to Moscow and my meeting with Lenin, my return to Moscow on the armored train of the XI Army and the establishment of Soviet power; all these moments loom as moving memories, they make me sorrow for my fallen comrades and feel proud of the cause for which they died.

*–Is it true that your comrades in the Kremlin call you "the Cuban"?*

–Sure, it's easy to explain. I had the good fortune to be the first to visit Cuba, get to know its leaders and understand the essence and character of its revolution. There's a very wise Russian proverb that says "seeing for yourself once is better than hearing 100 stories." And in view of the increasingly tight encirclement, the imperialist blockade, around Cuba, it was important to assess correctly the measures that the revolutionary government had applied. Practical aid from the Soviet Union was of extraordinary importance for aiding the revolution not only to survive but to emerge victorious. And since I not only realized this, but felt it with all my heart, at times they kiddingly called me *El Cubano.*

*Position One* is a collection of reportings and chronicles narrating highly significant events lived through by the author during the early years of the Cuban Revolution, from the first sugarcane harvests, through the recovery of industries sabotaged by imperialism to the fight against bandits. It describes scarcely known events such as the MIG-21 sorties, the activities of the first divers, the rehabilitation of prison inmates, the work of the border guards and the struggle by the State Security officers. It narrates with great expressive power episodes of an epic of which the Cuban people was its main protagonist.

NORBERTO FUENTES was born in Habana in 1943. He began his career as a reporter in *Mella* magazine. Subsequently, he has published in *Noticias de Hoy, Cuba Internacional* and *Granma*, as well as in several Latin American and European publications. In 1968 he was awarded the Casa de las Américas Prize for his story book *Condenados de Condado*. He majored in Hispanic American Literature at the University of Havana.

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