

## Cuba's Berlin Wall at Guantánamo: killings and disappearances of persons fleeing towards the U.S base

The infamous Berlin Wall came down over thirty years ago on November 9th 1989 and there is hardly anyone who ignores what it represented. A living replica in Cuba lasting six decades and with a toll believed to be considerably larger, remains largely ignored by the world. Barbed wire, high fences, mine fields, watch towers with armed sharpshooters ready to fire at unarmed civilians... the tropical version of the Berlin Wall is meant to stop escapees from Communist Cuba from reaching U.S. territory at the U.S. naval base in Guantánamo.

In the mid 1990s, the Cuban regime created its own distinct version of the wall by adding a sea wall in the bay to also make it much harder for Cubans to swim to the U.S. base. The sea wall has a net to allow for authorized maritime traffic. See Google Earth as well as for a testimony in Spanish on the construction of the sea wall: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcoKMXxhWNg>

During the Cold War, around 50,000 anti-personnel and anti-tank land mines had been placed by the U.S. in the buffer zone with Communist Cuba beginning in 1961, however, these were removed by Presidential Order of Bill Clinton in 1996.



*Sea wall at Guantánamo, with the net.*

During the 28-year existence of the Berlin Wall (1961-1989), 235 persons are documented to have been killed attempting to cross into West Berlin.<sup>1</sup>

The Cuban replica has cost countless victims mostly among unarmed civilians who have paid with their lives, limbs, eyesight, and/or years of prison for attempting to cross it. Cuba Archive has documented 12 extrajudicial killings, 35 disappearances in attempts to reach the U.S. base—the latter feared to have been killed by Cuban border guards—and two civilians blown up by the mines surrounding the base. Many anecdotal accounts indicate that the actual numbers of victims are much higher on all counts.

Successive U.S. administrations have by and large been silent on the systematic killings by Cuba to avoid provocation or fearing that the base would be overrun by asylum seekers. Theodore Scotese, who was Commander at the base's Camp Bulkeley in 1968, confirms that surrounding Cuban border guards had orders to shoot to kill to prevent people from "fence-jumping" into the U.S. side. The now retired former officer reports that U.S. government records are classified.<sup>2</sup> The Clinton administration filed a rare protest in the 1990s after a dramatic increase in the number of unarmed civilians shot by Cuban Border guards, many of whom were being fished with harpoons by Cuban authorities in the bay. See a testimony in Spanish on the awareness by U.S. personnel of these killings at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGLJ0JkOrF4>.

In January 2013, the Cuban government announced new regulations that relaxed very strict and decades-long travel restrictions on Cuban citizens, however, it still decides who may leave the country and uses this as a tool of political control. Importantly, Article 215 of Cuba's Penal Code continues to forbid Cuba's citizens from leaving Cuba without prior government authorization and punishes attempts to do so with years of prison. The

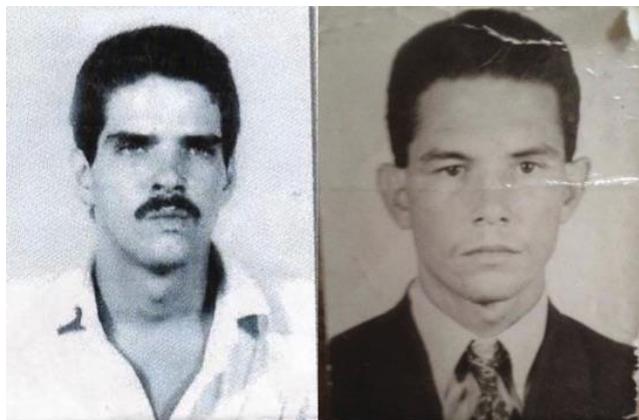
<sup>1</sup>Alexandra Hildebrandt, *Figures, Facts. Berlin: Die Deutsche Bibliothek Verl. Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, 2nd ed. 2005; and Hertle, Hans-Hermann; Nooke, Maria, The Victims at the Berlin Wall, 1961–1989: A Biographical Handbook. Ch. Links Verlag, 2011, p. 15.*

<sup>2</sup>Maria C. Werlu, *telephone interview with Theodore J. Scotese (of Knoxville, TN), January 2007; The 'Fence-Jumpers' of Gitmo, Circa 1968, Letters to the Editor, The Wall Street Journal, Jan. 4, 2007.*

nearby town of Caimanera, near the U.S. Naval Base, has been kept for decades by Cuban authorities under a permanent state of siege to prevent Cuban citizens from fleeing to the U.S. base. Only its residents (population of around 11,000) and heavily-vetted visitors are allowed entry after passing three control points. See a video report in Spanish at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy2uQwEoXDc>

While the U.S. naval base prison for individuals accused of terrorism receives widespread global condemnation, the killing fields and ghastly dungeons on the Cuban side of Guantanamo remain altogether ignored. It is high time for the double standard as well as this human tragedy to end.

Following are selected cases of killings and presumed disappearance. See details of these and many others in the database of documented deaths and disappearances at [database.CubaArchive.org](http://database.CubaArchive.org).



**Iskander Maleras Pedraza, age 26, and Luis Angel Valverde, age 30, were killed extrajudicially by Cuban Border guards on January 19, 1994** as they swam towards the U.S. base at Guantánamo with two friends to request asylum. When they were around fifty meters from the base, sharpshooters shot at them with long-range automatic rifles from a watchtower of the Cuban Border Guard on Cuban territory. Their friends pulled their dead bodies out of the water. The following day, Iskander's parents were told by authorities to go alone to the Guantanamo cemetery and were shown his body, riveted with bullet wounds. He and Luis Angel were quickly buried in

a large field at the cemetery where victims of foiled exit attempts are buried in unmarked graves. The two border guards who shot them were awarded medals for their deed. One of the two survivors made it into the U.S. base and eventually to the U.S., another was apprehended by Cuban Border guards, tried, sentenced to prison, and eventually also left for the U.S. Iskander's family was harassed, humiliated, persecuted, and eventually forced to seek political asylum in the United States. See his mother's testimony at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GmuE2SO6nxE>



**The brothers Otoniel and Rubén Rey Terrero, ages 22 and 25 respectively, disappeared on September 11, 1993** after leaving from the south coast of Santiago de Cuba with three others, planning to reach the U.S. base at Guantánamo to request asylum. Their brothers Reynaldo and Elioenay were imprisoned for attempting to escape Cuba also by reaching the base. After serving five years of prison, Elioenay tried to investigate what happened to his brothers and learned they had been killed by authorities while their three companions had survived and escaped Cuba. State Security agents threatened to imprison Elioenay if he continued asking questions.; he eventually emigrated to the U.S.

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