



José Adonis Peña Calzada, age 17, was killed in combat on January 6, 1961 during the Escambray uprising.

José was a resident of Trinidad, Las Villas (near the Circuito Sur highway). In the early 1960's, thousands of Cubans lost their lives and entire families were sent to concentration camps and later resettled during an uprising against Communism and the Castro government. Most of the rebels were small farmers opposed to the Communist government's confiscation of their land. Many were also former members of the Rebel Army against Batista who felt that Castro had betrayed the ideals of the Revolution.

To squash the uprising, the Castro regime sent thousands of men to comb the countryside area in what it called "limpias" ("clearings"). The small groups of rebels would end up trapped and many were deliberately burnt alive in the fields. Insurgents and peasant families in the combat areas endured other horrible atrocities. Scores of those captured were executed, often after summary trials or no trial at all. Among the victims, Cuba Archive has documented 14 minors executed for taking part in the anti-Castro uprising, and more than a dozen under age 18 are documented to have died in combat. Often, all the men in the family joined the uprising. Many men on the side of the Castro militia and army also died in combat.

José Adonis, age 17, left to join the Escambray rebels in July of 1960. His brother, age 15, left a month later, and their father also joined. They were all in separate groups of insurgents. Fellow rebels related the story of his death to his family. José Adonis had a Remington rifle that was malfunctioning. To recharge, he had to hit the cartridge against something. In a combat situation on January 6, 1961, the order to retreat was given. Because of his rifle's malfunction, he was left essentially disarmed. Trying to retreat, he was shot from the side. The government confirmed his death to the family, but his body was not returned for burial, as was customary in the case of rebels. They were buried in locations unknown to their loved ones.

His brother, Juan Antonio, was captured on February 6, 1961 and was sent to several different prisons. After serving one and a half years, he was released conditionally because he was a minor. On December 15, 1971, most former insurgents from the area (about 3,000) were rounded up and taken to Pinar del Rio, where they were put to work building houses and paid very low wages. A few months later, over 200 of them were sent to Miraflores, Camaguey, to work in a concentration camp. After they built the houses, their families were forcibly relocated there. They could not leave the premises without authorization and were given very little and terrible food. Juan Antonio spent 24 years there. Both his father and mother died there. In 1991, he left for exile in the United States. The Escambray uprising was finally extinguished in 1964.

Sources: Written testimony of brother, Juan Antonio Peña Calzada, March 6, 2005, in writing and by telephone conversation, April 3, 2006. Also see the story of the insurgency in Enrique Encinosa, Unvanquished: Cuba's Resistance to Fidel Castro (Los Angeles: Pureplay Press, 2004).

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