

Juan Owen Delgado, age 15, died after a beating at Villa Marista State Security headquarters in Havana on March 3, 1981



Juan Owen was a high school student. His father, Rómulo, was a Captain in the Ministry of the Interior; with his four brothers, they had a long history of service to the Revolution. They had been part of the 26th of July Movement against Batista and went to serve in the Ministry of the Interior, one was a judge, one was an officer in the Armed Forces. Two were also veterans of Cuban interventions in Yemen and Angola. Rómulo and his brother Pascual became disenchanted with the government and joined the opposition. They were informed on by a snitch and were alerted that they were going to be apprehended, so they decided that their only alternative was to seek asylum.

On February 14, 1981, 14 family members, including three women and four minors forced their entry into the embassy of Ecuador. They group had an old revolver and a pistol, which they immediately handed over to Ecuadorian authorities. The Ambassador, Jorge Pérez Concha, gave them asylum right away and began negotiations to obtain their safe exit from the country. Rómulo and his wife were with their sons, ages 15, 12, and 11.

A week later, on February 21, 1981, the Ambassador left the premises to go get food and a Cuban Special Forces team stormed the embassy. Ecuador stated that Cuba did not have authorization, but Cuba insisted the operation had been approved and an official who later defected from Cuban Intelligence has confirmed this.

The family was taken to State Security Headquarters at Villa Marista, Havana, where the minors were separated from their parents. Owen was brutally beaten, suffering blows to the face and head; he was taken home with one ear nearly severed. As his condition worsened, he was transported to the Pinar del Rio hospital, where he lapsed into a coma and died two days later. His parents were advised he had died and allowed to attend a quick burial at the hands of state authorities.

Several family members were sentenced to long prison terms, including Owen's father, Rómulo, to 42 years, and his mother to 15 years. His uncle, Domingo, who worked as a judge for the Ministry of the Interior and had not participated in the embassy incident, resigned from his post to represent the group in court. For this, he was sentenced to 8 years of prison. Some sentences were later shortened due to international pressure and Rómulo was released after 15 years.

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