



Forced blood extraction of political prisoners before their execution in revolutionary Cuba

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Work-in-progress

In 1966, U.S. media outlets reported accounts of the forced blood extraction of political prisoners in Cuba to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) of the Organization of American States (OAS).¹ One report of August 1966 cited eyewitness who had fled Cuba including one who reported having worked at La Cabaña prison.² When these news articles were published, the IACHR had “partly confirmed” the accounts and stated that it was gathering more information with diplomats and other sources in Cuba. Around eight months later, in April 1967,³ the IACHR issued a scathing report denouncing that at Havana’s La Cabaña Fortress prison blood was extracted from prisoners on their way to execution “with illicit and massive intentions ... for scandalous business purposes.”

According to the IACHR’s report, on May 27, 1966, from 6AM until 6PM, 166 individuals (military and civilian) had been executed by a four-man firing squad after their blood had been forcibly drained. An average of seven pints⁴ of blood had been extracted per person, provoking cerebral anemia and a state of unconsciousness and paralysis. After the blood was drained, the prisoners were taken by two militiamen in a stretcher to the location where they were shot to death. The report also described that Soviet and Cuban hematologists, together with trained assistants, extracted the blood and used it to conduct experiments at a special health facility at the prison. Soviet medical personnel reportedly was also operating a blood bank at the former Medical Cooperative at 13th St., corner of 8th, at the Vedado neighborhood of Havana city. In addition, the IACHR reported that blood donations were required from the family members of political prisoners (numbering tens of thousands all over Cuba) as a condition to being allowed visits; local blood banks were used to take the coerced donations.⁵ The blood was reportedly sold to North Vietnam for 50 dollars a pint.⁶

Fidel Castro apparently admitted to this practice in public. On February 6, 1961, he is cited as follows: “The counterrevolutionaries should not believe that by dying infamously in front of the (firing) wall, they will no longer be useful to the Cuban Revolution. The blood of these traitors is being extracted before the execution

¹ Robert S. Allen and Paul Scott, “More prisoner atrocities in Cuba,” *La Crosse Tribune*, Aug. 19, 1966, p. 4. (This report cites accounts provided by the General Secretary of the Miami-based Committee for the Humane Treatment of Political Prisoners in Cuba, Dr. Miguel Angel Olba Benito.)

² “Castro’s atrocities against prisoners,” *Kingsport Post*, Sep. 8, 1966.

³ “Segundo Informe sobre la Situación de los Presos Políticos y Sus Familias en Cuba,” Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Organización de Estados Americanos, Informe sobre la situación de los derechos humanos en Cuba, Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Organización de Estados Americanos, OEA/Ser. L/V/II.17, Doc. 4 (español), Apr. 7, 1967, <http://www.cidh.oas.org/countryrep/Cuba67sp/cap.1a.htm#E>.

⁴ One pint is equal to .47 liters. The average person has around 10 pints or 5 liters of blood, depending on their size, or 1/11th of their weight. The average blood donation to the U.S. Red Cross is one pint or half a liter. (See www.redcrossblood.org.)

⁵ “Segundo Informe sobre la Situación de los Presos Políticos y Sus Familias en Cuba,” op. cit.

⁶ At US\$50 per pint, the seven pints extracted per involuntary victim of the firing squads would have fetched average revenues of US\$350. The revenues per prisoner increased with each coerced donation for all family visits.

to save the lives of many militiamen willing to die for the homeland.”⁷ To date, attempts to verify the original source of this quote have been unsuccessful and it cannot be confirmed if or where Castro made the statement. However, the quote appears in a highly credible publication of in 1965 that consists of a compendium of events of the year 1959 and is based on a bibliography of reputable news sources from Cuba and the United States. Experts consulted by Cuba Archive believe it is compatible with Fidel Castro’s style of speech.

What is incontrovertible is that on January 2nd, 1966, speaking at the celebration of the 7th anniversary of the triumph of the revolution, Fidel Castro boasted that Cuba provided blood to Vietnam: “To the Vietnamese people, we are willing not just to give them our sugar but also our blood, which is worth much more than our sugar.”⁸ This quote is still cited by Cuba’s official state-controlled media. Lt. Col. Omar Ruíz Matoses, a former high-ranking officer of Cuba’s counterintelligence services, reports that the Vietnamese government officially protested Cuba’s so-called “generosity.”⁹ Perhaps as a result, Fidel Castro was more subdued at a solidarity act with Vietnam at Havana’s Revolution Plaza on June 3rd 1969, when he declared: “When we say that we are willing to shed our blood for Vietnam, we are not saying anything extraordinary, because the people of Viet Nam have not offered to shed their blood for us and for other peoples but, rather, they have shed their blood for us and for other peoples!”¹⁰

Documented cases of forced blood extraction before execution

To date, Cuba Archive has documented to date 31 cases of forced blood extraction of political prisoners before their execution by firing squad; 28 of the victims were Cubans and 3 were U.S. citizens, all were accused of participating in the anti-Communist resistance. These executions took place between 1960 to 1964 in different provinces of Cuba, which indicates the practice occurred in different prison facilities around the country over a period of at least four years. It might have been imposed on hundreds of men before their execution. From 1960 to 1967, the years of the anti-Communist insurgency, Cuba Archive has to date documented 1,856 executions.¹¹

Because the victims had already said their farewells to fellow prisoners before being escorted from their cells and, once executed, their families were not given the bodies for burial, the blood extraction was kept mostly covert. However, in certain cases, family members learned of the practice from friends or relatives of prison guards or others otherwise involved. After the 1964 execution of three men in Camaguey, for instance, a relative of one of the deceased knew a man who had helped bury the bodies in a common grave who agreed to lead the families to the location and helped retrieve the bodies —upon examination, it was found that their blood had been drained before the execution.¹²

Additional anecdotal accounts by former political prisoners are insufficient for documentation purposes.

Following is the list of documented cases and selected case profiles of some of the victims of forced blood extraction before their execution.

⁷ Leovigildo Ruíz, *Diario de una traición: 1959*, Miami: Lorie Book Stores, 1972. (Translated from Spanish.)

⁸ “Fidel Castro: ‘La humanidad agradecerá eternamente a Vietnam,’” *Cuba Debate* (Equipo Editorial Fidel Soldado de las Ideas), Mar. 28, 2018, <http://www.cubadebate.cu/especiales/2018/03/28/fidel-castro-la-humanidad-agradecera-eternamente-a-vietnam/>. (Translation from Spanish.)

⁹ Maria Werlau, telephone interview with Lt. Col. (ret.) Omar Ruíz Matoses, Mar. 26, 2021.

¹⁰ “Fidel Castro: ‘La humanidad agradecerá eternamente a Vietnam,’” op. cit. (Translation from Spanish.)

¹¹ See CubaArchive.org/database.

¹² The victims were Alberto Fernández Medrano, Marcelino Martínez Tapia, and Manuel Paradela Gómez, members of the anti-Communist resistance executed Jun. 1, 1964 in Camaguey for counterrevolutionary activities after a summary trial. See CubaArchive.org/database.

List of documented cases of reported blood extraction before execution Updated to May 30, 2021

*See case details at www.CubaArchive.org/database/.

1. Howard Anderson, age 41, Apr. 19, 1961, Pinar del Río
2. Bernardo Barrabí, age 20, Dec. 1, 1961, Matanzas
3. Orlando Barrabí, Dec. 1, 1961, Matanzas
4. Antonio Covela, age 30, Nov. 9, 1963, La Habana (La Cabaña)
5. Andrew de Graux Villafaña, age 19, Sep. 1962, Las Villas
6. Raúl Díaz Naranjo, age 40, Aug. 15, 1964, Holguín
7. Alberto Fernández Medrano, Jun. 1, 1964, Camagüey
8. Robert Fuller, age 25, Oct. 16, 1960, Santiago de Cuba
9. Teodoro García, Nov. 15, 1963, Las Villas
10. Pedro Gutiérrez Campos, Mar. 31, 1964, Las Villas
11. Oscar Hernández Rodríguez, age 34, Sep. 24, 1962, Las Villas
12. Adriano Lasbar Hernández, Feb. 28, 1961, Las Villas
13. Edelio López Rodríguez, Nov. 15, 1963, Las Villas
14. Cecilio Marín Espinosa, Nov. 15, 1963, Las Villas
15. Antonio Martell, age 19, Mar. 14, 1961, La Habana (La Cabaña)
16. Marcelino Martínez Tapia, age 59, Jun. 1, 1964, Camagüey
17. Clodomiro Miranda, Jan. 24, 1961, La Habana (La Cabaña)
18. Jesús Claro Mollinedo Camacho, Sep. 24, 1962, Las Villas
19. Manuel Paradela Gómez, age 44, Jun. 1, 1964, Camagüey
20. Florentino Pelaez (father), Nov. 15, 1963, Las Villas
21. Florentino Pelaez (son), age 17, Nov. 15, 1963, Las Villas
22. Juan Pérez Cabrera, age 46, Apr. 15, 1963, Santiago de Cuba
23. Onelio Pérez Redilla, age 32, Sep. 18, 1963, Las Villas
24. Demetrio Pérez Rodríguez, Nov. 15, 1963, Las Villas
25. Florencio Recino, age 23, Mar. 28, 1962, Las Villas
26. Orlando Rodríguez Álvarez, age --, Dec. 1, 1961, Matanzas
27. José Rodríguez Ocampo, age 42, Nov. 2, 1963, La Habana (La Cabaña)
28. Ángel Moisés Ruíz Ramos, age 24, Dec. 1, 1961, Matanzas
29. Elizardo Santana Bonilla, age 24, Mar. 13, 1962, Las Villas
30. Aldo Santos del Pino, Nov. 15, 1963, Las Villas
31. Allen Dale Thompson, age 36, Oct. 10, 1960, Santiago de Cuba

Case profiles of selected cases of forcible blood extraction



Howard Anderson, age 41, was executed by firing squad on April 19, 1961, in Pinar del Río. He was sentenced to death after a sham trial, accused of making contacts with the Cuban resistance to support the Bay of Pigs invasion that had started two days earlier. Swiss diplomats attended the trial. Before his execution, he was savagely tortured and most of his blood was extracted (the Cuban government alleged the blood was used to treat revolutionaries wounded in the invasion). He was buried in a mass grave. The United States government forwarded a stiff protest to the Cuban government declaring the executions violated “the elementary standards of justice practiced by the civilized nations of the world.” Anderson owned a service stations in Cuba. He had settled there after serving in Cuba as a chief petty officer in the U.S. Navy. His widow and children sued the Cuban government for damages in U.S federal court and in 2003 obtained an award of \$67 million.



19-year-old **Andrew De Graux**, “el americanito,” was executed on September 13, 1962, in Sancti Spíritus, Las Villas. He had joined the uprising led by small farmers against the Communist regime and was shot in the gluteus and shoulder during a combat with Castro on September 13th, 1962. Unable to walk, he was captured and taken to a hospital in Trinidad for medical treatment where he was denied water and subjected to psychological torture. State Security then ordered his transfer to a hospital in Cienfuegos, where he was operated on successfully. When the doctor went to see him after the surgery, he was told he had died; although his body was not at the morgue, he was asked to sign a death certificate, which he refused. Andy’s family was told he had died from his injuries and had been buried in a common grave in a cemetery in Cienfuegos. Political prisoners later reported that Andy had been taken to La Campana military camp in Las Villas, where he was severely beaten, and his blood forcibly extracted before his execution.



Robert (Bobby) Fuller, age 25, and **Allen Dale Thompson**, age 36, were executed on October 16, 1960, in Santiago de Cuba. Bobby’s family had arrived in Cuba in 1903 and had land and businesses in Holguín that had been confiscated by the Castro government. Bobby grew up in the US and served in the Korean War. Allen were determined to help liberate Cuba from Communism, Bobby landed in Cuba in October 1960 at Navas Bay, Oriente province, with a group of 28 men planning to start a guerrilla operation. Their leader died in combat on October 6th and two men were reportedly captured but the rest escaped into the mountains. On October 15th, Bobby was captured with three others, another US citizen and two Cubans. By 4P.M. that day, the two Americans were sentenced to death and the two Cubans to prison at a trial held at a large stadium with thousands of people cheering. The death sentences were to be carried out immediately. Before Bobby was led to his execution, his uncle and cousin were allowed to see him. They found him very weak and barely able to stand; he told them that his blood had been forcibly drained from his body. The U.S. filed a diplomatic note of protest. Bobby and Allen were buried in an unmarked grave. Allen’s uncle and aunt, who reared him after his mother’s death, appealed to the Cuban government through the Red Cross for the return of their nephew’s body, but their requests were denied. Bobby’s widow and daughter 2003 won a default judgment in the US in 2003 against the Cuban government under the Civil Liability for Acts of State Sponsored Terrorism of the Foreign Sovereign Immunities Act and the Torture Victim Protection Act.



Alberto Fernández Medrano, a lawyer, **Manuel Paradela Gómez**, a businessman, and **Marcelino Martínez Tapia**, a lawyer and former congressman, all well-known and civic leaders from Camagüey, were executed on June 1, 1964, in Camagüey 52 days after their arrest. Accused of counterrevolutionary activities, they were sentenced to death in a summary process and taken from their trial directly to their execution. The families were not allowed to collect the bodies for burial but a man

who had helped bury them led the families to their common grave. Upon examination, the bodies had clear signs that their blood had been drained before the execution.



Pedro Gutiérrez Campos, “Chin,” was executed March 31, 1964, at the Las Villas civil cemetery. The former Rebel Army member had fought the Batista dictatorship and joined anti-Castro insurgency when it broke its promise to restore democracy. He was captured with a wound to the stomach at the battle of Zaza Sugar Mill, Placetas, Las Villas. He was executed by firing squad tied to a stool after his blood had been forcefully extracted.



Edelio López Rodríguez, a small farmer, and **Demetrio Pérez Rodríguez**, a former member of the Rebel Army against Batista and a sergeant in the revolutionary police, were executed on November 15, 1963, in Santa Clara with five other small farmers, all members of the resistance (**Cecilio Marín, Aldo Santos, Teodoro García, and Florentino Pelaez, father and son**). They had been captured less than two months earlier, on September 18, 1963, and executed shortly after a summary trial. Before their execution, most of their blood was extracted.



Clodomiro Miranda was executed on January 24, 1961, at La Cabaña Fortress prison in Havana. He led a large anti-Castro guerrilla group operating in the province of Pinar del Río and was captured during a ferocious battle on December 7, 1960. He suffered wounds to his legs, arms, and thorax yet had his blood forcibly extracted and was brought to his execution on a stretcher. Unable to stand, he was shot while lying on the ground.



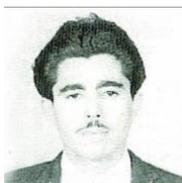
Jesús Claro Mollinedo was executed September 24, 1962, at Calabazar de Sagua, Las Villas. The small farmer had been part of the insurgency against the Batista dictatorship and initially supported the revolution. He joined the anti-Castro resistance that was hugely outnumbered and fighting against great odds. On September 14th, 1962, he was captured, interrogated, and tortured at State Security headquarters in Santa Clara, then executed after his blood was forcibly extracted.



Ángel Moisés Ruíz, age 24, was executed December 1, 1961, at the Agramonte Cemetery of Matanzas with **Orlando Rodríguez Álvarez** and the brothers **Bernardo and Orlando Barrabí**. Angel was a farmer from a humble family who had become leader of the anti-Castro resistance in Matanzas. A person close to him informed authorities of his activities and masked men took him from his home, where he lived with his parents, with a hood on his head in the middle of the night. That night he was executed with three fellow members of resistance after their blood had been forcefully extracted. The family learned of the execution from the state-controlled media and was unable to obtain a death certificate.



Juan Pérez Cabrera, age 36, was shot killed on August 15, 1963, at Boniato prison, Santiago de Cuba. Pérez had been leader of an anti-Communist resistance group in Camagüey and had been hiding at his brother's house for eight months with an 18-year-old friend from the resistance, "Andrés." A neighbor informed authorities and they left in a rush with Juan's brother, driving towards Guantánamo to seek asylum at the U.S. naval base. Found by government forces, Andrés was killed, and Juan's face was rubbed in his blood. During the three months in prison, Juan's family was allowed a visit and found in terrible condition from tortures. On the way to his execution Juan was taken to the small prison clinic to have his blood extracted, which he refused, and shot in the forehead. He left a wife and four children. Juan's brother served five years of prison, was tortured, and almost lost his sight.



Elizardo Santana Bonilla, age 24, was executed March 13, 1962, at Calabazar de Sagua, Las Villas. He was part of the anti-Castro uprising led by small farmers and a member of Claro Mollinedo's rebel band operating in the Escambray mountains. His blood was forcibly extracted prior to his execution. The prosecutor refused to grant him his last request, a drink of water.



Truth and Memory Project

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