

Cuba's Berlin Wall Still Stands: Killings and Disappearances of Persons Fleeing Towards the U.S. Base at Guantánamo

November 10, 2014

November 9th 1989 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall. As we celebrate the crumbling of the infamous iron curtain, we remember that a living replica stands in Cuba, almost double the age. Barbed wire, high fences, mine fields, watch towers with armed sharpshooters ready to fire at unarmed civilians... the tropical version of the Berlin Wall prevents escapees from Communist Cuba from reaching U.S. territory at the naval base Guantánamo. The Cuban government



even created its distinctive version by also building a sea wall in the bay in the mid 1990s to prevent Cubans from swimming to the U.S. base. It has a net in the middle to allow for authorized maritime traffic. (See a testimony in Spanish at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcoKMXhWNg> and the image on google earth as well as photos at www.pinceladasdecuba.com/2009/04/la-hipocresia-mundial-el-muro-de.html).

During the 28-year existence of the Berlin Wall (1961-1989), 227 persons were killed attempting to cross into West Berlin.¹ In the 55 years of the Cuban version, countless thousands have paid with their lives, their limbs, or with years of prison for attempting to cross the Cuban barrier at Guantánamo. (See list below of documented/reported victims. A more extensive list of disappeared in attempts to reach the base exists, many feared killed by border guards.)

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 as a result of the Cold War, but were removed without much publicity in 1996 by Presidential Order. Successive U.S. administrations have by and large remained silent of the systematic killings by Cuba to avoid provoking the Castros and having the base overrun by asylum seekers. But, the Clinton administration filed a rare protest in the 1990s apparently after U.S. personnel at the base reported that the number shot by Cuban Border guards and fished with harpoons from the bay had increased dramatically. Theodore Scotese, who was Commander at the base's Camp Bulkeley in 1968, has confirmed that Cuban border guards stationed around the base had orders to shoot to kill to prevent people from fence-jumping. The now retired former officer reports that U.S. government records are classified.² See testimony in Spanish on U.S. personnel awareness of the killings at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FGLJ0JkOrF4>



Despite announcing new regulations that relaxed decades-long travel restrictions by Cuba starting January 2013, Article 215 of Cuba's Penal Code continues to forbid Cuba's citizens from leaving the island without prior government authorization. Attempting to do so is punishable with years of prison. The will to prevent its citizens from fleeing is so staunch that the town of Caimanera, near the U.S. Naval Base has been under permanent state of siege for decades. Only residents (population of around 11,000) and heavily vetted visitors are allowed entry after passing three control points. See video report in Spanish at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oy2uQwEoXDc>



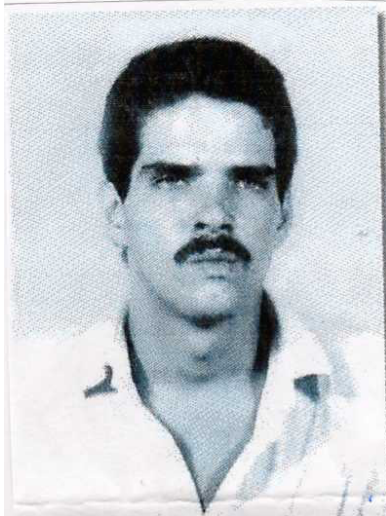
While the U.S. naval base prison for accused terrorists receives widespread condemnation, the Cuban killing fields and as the ghastly dungeons on the Cuban side of Guantánamo remain altogether ignored. It is high time for the double standard and for this human tragedy to end.

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¹ Alexandra Hildebrandt, *Figures, Facts. Berlin: Die Deutsche Bibliothek Verl. Haus am Checkpoint Charlie, 2nd ed. 2005.*

² Telephone interview, January 2007; Theodore J. Scotese (Knoxville, Tenn.), *The 'Fence-Jumpers' Of Gitmo, Circa 1968, Letters to the Editor, The Wall*

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SELECTED CASE PROFILE

Iskander Maleras Pedraza, Age 26. Murdered by Cuban Border guards, January 19, 1994, as he swam towards the U.S. base at Guantánamo. Iskander left from Guantánamo with three friends to swim to the U.S. Naval Base to request asylum. When they were approximately fifty meters from the base, they were shot with long-range automatic rifles from a watchtower of the Cuban Border Guard. His friends pulled his dead body and that of his friend Luis Angel Valverde, age 30, out of the water. The next day his 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 through the U.S. Naval base are buried in unmarked graves. One of the two survivors made it into the base and eventually to the U.S., another was apprehended by Cuban Border guards, tried, and sentenced to prison. 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>

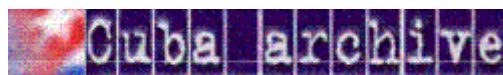
EXIT ATTEMPT: EXTRAJUDICIAL OR DELIBERATE KILLING

N/A (Sister)	Alvarez Aguado	1978		
N/A (Brother)	Alvarez Aguado	1978		
Francisco	Arcano Galano	1965	10	23
Raúl	Atala Ladua	1966	11	28
Pedro	Barana	1966	10	23
Remberto	Brausen	1959	1	6
Adolfo	Chamizo Zayas	1968	6	10
René	Cruz Ramírez	1967	1	
Juan Enrique	Gómez Vidal	1982		
Rosa	González	1963	12	27
Genovevo	Grinan	1988	9	17
Luis	Jiménez Delgado	1966		
Nelson	Lopez	1966	9	20
Iskander	Maleras Pedraza	1994	1	19
Larey	Mendoza Reytor	1994	5	27
Alexander	Mustafat Viltés	1994	5	27
Ruben	Rey Terrero	1993	9	11
Otoniel	Rey Terrero	1993	9	11
Víctor	Rosalba Arza	1963	4	23
Alberto	Rosalba Arza	1963	4	23
Jose	Silva Cruz	1960		
Luis Angel	Valverde Linfernal	1994	1	19



KILLED OR DISAPPEARED IN GUANTANAMO EXIT ATTEMPTS

<i>Name</i>	<i>Last name</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Mo.</i>	<i>Day</i>
KILLED BY MINE EXPLOSION				
Lino	López Quintana	1977	7	31
Ernesto	Navarro Sarmiento	2001	5	10
Bienvenido	Rodríguez	1992	7	5
Amaury Noel	Vara	1998		
Amado	Veloso Vega	1992	11	11
Manuel	Whitaker	1993		
Miguel Angel	N/A	2011	3	11



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