

The birth of a revolution

Fulgencio Batista ruled Cuba through a succession of puppet presidents and then seized power in 1952. His regime provoked years of violent opposition that propelled Fidel Castro to power.

THE REBELS

Primary members of the revolutionary group 26th of July Movement (M-26-7) — named after Castro's failed July 26, 1953 attack on the Moncada military barracks — fought the major battles against Batista's army.



FIDEL A. CASTRO RUZ
Leader of attacks on Batista's regime spent nearly two years in jail for the failed Moncada attack. Became president of Cuba in 1959.



RAÚL CASTRO RUZ
Fidel's younger brother, spent 22 months in jail for the Moncada attack; took part in the Sierra Maestra battles. He is provisional vice president of Cuba.



CAMILO CIENFUEGOS
Commander of a 700-man rebel army against government troops in southern Cuba. A year after victory, he disappeared over the ocean in a Cessna airplane.



JOSÉ A. ECHEVERRÍA
The leader of the Revolutionary Directorate was killed in 1957 during a failed attack on the Presidential Palace by Havana University students.



ERNESTO 'CHE' GUEVARA
Guerrilla led attacks against government troops in southern Cuba. Killed by Bolivian army on Oct. 9, 1967, where he was trying to start a revolution.



FRANK PAÍS
Organized the strongest of the underground resistance for the 26th of July movement. Killed by police in Santiago de Cuba on July 30, 1957.



ABEL SANTAMARÍA
Core member of M-26-7 was captured and killed after the 1953 Moncada attack, which he helped plan with his sister and Fidel Castro.



HUBER MATOS
Brought a plane load of weapons to Castro in March 1958. Later opposed Castro's ideology and was sent to prison for 20 years. Exiled to Miami in 1979.

ATTACKING BATISTA'S GOVERNMENT

Castro's rise to power started with several failed attacks, but he had tremendous support of the people, who were tired of the government's brutality and corruption. In 1957, the guerrillas launched successful campaigns against Batista's army and took the provinces of Oriente, Camagüey and Las Villas on the way to the island's capital, Havana.



CUBA, 1953-57

JULY 26, 1953: CASTRO'S FIRST ATTACK FAILS



Castro and about 90 rebels attacked the Moncada army post, the second largest fortress in Cuba. Eight rebels were killed during the battle and 53 were captured and executed. Castro escaped but later surrendered and was sentenced to 15 years. Released after 22 months, he traveled to the United States and later Mexico, where he met Guevara.

DEC. 2, 1956: FIDEL RETURNS FROM MEXICO



Castro and 82 men headed to Cuba aboard a beat-up yacht called *The Granma*. They were forced to land on a swampy beach and were unable to unload most of their weapons.

Routed by Batista's army, Castro, his brother Raúl, Cienfuegos, Guevara and eight others escaped to the Sierra Maestra.

CUBA, 1958-59

By the start of 1958, Castro had established fixed headquarters at La Plata, and began a series of successful campaigns against Batista's troops.

- Raúl Castro, March '58
- Camilo Cienfuegos, Oct. - Dec. '58
- Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, Oct. - Dec. '58
- Cienfuegos/Guevara, Dec. '58 - Jan. '59

JAN. 17, 1957: FINALLY, SUCCESS
Rebels sacked an army outpost on the south coast and started gaining supporters in both Cuba and abroad.

MAY 28, 1957: GAINING MOMENTUM
Rebels overwhelmed another army outpost and captured badly needed supplies.



DEC. 28, 1958: THE FINAL BLOW

Guevara's men captured an armored train sent to reinforce Santa Clara and entered the town. Meanwhile, Cienfuegos was locked in battle in Yaguajay, but Batista's troops surrendered on Dec. 31.

FEB. 1958: GAINING GROUND

Brother Raúl Castro opened a second front in Oriente's north coast.

OCT. - DEC. 1958: REBELS ADVANCE
After long marches, Guevara and Cienfuegos opened up additional fronts in central Cuba. They cut rail and road links and won important battles.

MAY 1958: THE TURNING POINT

Batista sent an army of 10,000 into the Sierra Maestra, but by August, Castro's 300 guerrillas had defeated the army, capturing a large number of weapons.

10 JAN. 1, 1959: THE REBELS ARE VICTORIOUS

Batista fled with millions of dollars in stolen government funds to the Dominican Republic and then Portugal. Castro's army entered Santiago de Cuba that night; Guevara and Cienfuegos arrived in Havana on Jan. 2.

◀ Fidel Castro addresses a crowd of several hundred thousand people gathered in front of the Presidential Palace in Havana in January 1959.

Photos provided by AP and www.latinamericanstudies.org

CUBA BEFORE CASTRO



FULGENCIO BATISTA

On May 20, 1902, Cuba became an independent republic, but U.S. interference gave the island a series of weak, corrupt and dependent governments.

By the 1920s, U.S. companies owned two-thirds of Cuba's farmland and most of its mines. The sugar industry was booming, and with the U.S. prohibition (1919-33), organized crime moved in, taking over the casinos, booze, drug running and prostitution.

Toward the late 1920s, Cuba came under its first dictator, Gerardo Machado y Morales. By August 1933, Machado was toppled and escaped into exile. An army sergeant named Fulgencio Batista stepped into power.

Batista ruled Cuba through a succession of puppet presidents until 1940, when he was elected to the post. Because of term limits on his presidency, he left Cuba at the end of his term.

The average Cuban worked and lived like a peasant, with none of the benefits trickling down. The gap between rich and poor grew wider. Batista returned to Cuba in 1952 and seized power.

