

Introduction

On July 20, 1961, I was assigned to the Attacks Bureau, the Cuban Security Department unit responsible for investigating plots and conspiracies against revolutionary leaders. It was a memorable day, not only because it marked my debut as an operative officer, but also because I had the pleasure and honor of meeting the people who, from that moment, would be my *compañeros*.

The first was Mario Morales Mesa, known as Miguel — our chief, who had been an internationalist combatant in the Spanish Civil War and was a communist and a born investigator. A small, slim man with a fine mustache like those worn in the 1940s, he possessed an ironclad will and personal courage in the face of every test. Dozens of anecdotes were related about him, some from his time fighting in the International Brigades in Spain. In one story, he was made responsible for a light submachine gun of Soviet manufacture known as a Maxim, and was thereafter known himself by that nickname, as he had a particular way of firing the gun so that, his *compañeros* claimed, it imitated the sounds of a Cuban rumba.

Later, as some of his *compañeros* related, he was taken prisoner and placed in a concentration camp in fascist-occupied France, where he managed, in conjunction with the Senegalese guards who looked after the prisoners, to open a little store which sold milk to the capos of the place and gave it away free to the most needy.

Mario was a real character who lived for 80-plus years. When I met him, I had returned to Cuba after training in the Soviet Union,

2 Executive Action

with lots of theory but little practical knowledge of the realities that I would have to confront. Mario taught me skills in daily combat and investigative skills that cannot be acquired in any school, however good it might be.

He was an unpredictable person. On one occasion when, tired and hungry, we went to eat hot dogs from a van parked behind the famous Hotel Nacional in Havana, he recognized one of the owners of the place as a former officer in the army of the Batista dictatorship.¹ After identifying him as a sympathizer of the general [Batista], he set about conspiring with him, while indicating to me that I should eat as quickly as I could. When we had finished eating, the subject took us to a corner of the van, and with some pride, showed us a crate of incendiary devices, explosives manufactured with a “live phosphorus” base, at that time one of the CIA’s most sophisticated inventions for acts of sabotage. Quick as a flash and without giving me time to react, Mario pulled out his revolver and arrested them all, seizing those mechanisms of destruction.

Perhaps because of that rapidity with which he always acted, he utilized a particular expression when he was talking: “You understand,” which he insistently repeated every time he was referring to something.

I also remember Carlos Enrique Díaz Camacho, whose nickname was Trillo, one of the *compañeros* who most deeply impressed me and with whom I was friends until his death in 1964 at enemy hands. He was a man in his 30s, an old man to those of us who had just passed 20. One day I found him in Mario’s house, where our office was located, with a cache of valuable jewels in his hands, wrapped in a woman’s handkerchief. The jewels came from the Cuban bourgeoisie who were frantically trying to get them out of the country. Trillo was an agent who, by right, belonged to the small world of the Havana bourgeoisie, and who hung out with people of

1. Fulgencio Batista: Cuban dictator who came to power through a coup d’état and ruled from 1952 to 1958.

his own social milieu aware of his solid links with various European ambassadors, through whom they hoped to get documents, valuable jewelry and assets – not always legitimately obtained – out of the country. On many occasions – and justly so – those riches were returned to the people at a time when they were most needed.

Once, we were with Trillo in the anteroom of the office of Captain Elíseo Reyes, known as San Luis,² then chief of the G-2 revolutionary police. Two other police officers were also waiting there, one of them known to Trillo. In a low voice, he exchanged words with the individual, making him believe that I had brought him in as a prisoner, and in a few minutes he had exposed him as an active conspirator within the police ranks.

I recall Trillo always wearing a light suit, with a mischievous look in his eyes and an expression on his lips: “Tell you later,” which of course he never did.

Another of my *compañeros*, José Veiga, better known as Morán, who had worked undercover in the United States and who spoke English perfectly and enjoyed opera, had an inexhaustible imagination. He always had an idea at the ready, even if it was impossible to realize.

Carlos Valdés, Pedro Piñero, Mayiyo and others completed that group of no more than a dozen men who played an outstanding role in the fight against the assassination plots of the CIA and its Cuban associates against revolutionary leaders, particularly *compañero* Fidel.

Many recollections come to mind of those years, when sometimes we didn't have a working budget or a cent to buy something to eat, while in the desk drawer there were thousands of pesos, dollars or valuable jewelry, and it never occurred to us to take something to satisfy any need, including that of our work.

2. Elíseo Reyes: a captain of the Rebel Army who fought with Che Guevara in his Bolivian campaign and was killed in the struggle for Latin American independence.

4 Executive Action

All of my *compañeros* are present in this story, not just those that are mentioned, but also many more who gave the best of themselves in this silent war against terrorism. In addition to performing these heroic deeds, in many cases they have been witness to the incidents related. This story is a tribute to that group of anonymous combatants, dedicated to them with all the love and affection that emerged from the heat of the years and adventures we experienced.

Perhaps readers will find it strange that I have used the word love in introducing the theme expounded in the following chapters. I can explain by affirming that love of the homeland and our people has been, is, and will be the motivation for our undertakings and struggles, as well as the basis of this great adventure that is the Cuban revolution. To it and to my *compañeros*, present and fallen, my eternal gratitude and remembrance.