

Free Cuba News

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INSIDE CUBA

SOVIET MILITARY ACTIVITY INCREASES IN CUBA

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BOB DOLE

Russian ships continue to land great quantities of arms, munitions, and Stalin tanks at Cuba's ports. The Soviets have also debarked new contingents of troops through the north coast port of Mariel in Pinar del Rio Province, and are engaged in military construction throughout the island. This information reaches Free Cuba News from scores of recent escapees from the island and is corroborated by reliable reports from Cuban resistance forces still operating on the island. Among the reports is an eyewitness account of the construction of underground plane hangars in Oriente Province.

● Luis Delgado, age 48, was spokesman for a group of 29 fishermen from Mariel who escaped in the middle of December: "Many arms have continued to arrive at Mariel over the past two months. A Russian ship docked December 10 and the area was placed off-limits to all but the most trusted military units. Roads were blocked and guarded as the ship debarked cannon and tons of arms and munitions." "Two months ago," said his fellow escapee, 28 year-old Claudio Martínez, "a Russian ship left Mariel with some Soviet personnel. One month later, at the end of November, however, more Russian troops arrived." Martínez said that somewhat smaller contingents keep coming to Cuba regularly. Cuban fishermen, in particular, have been able to ascertain this movement from the vantage point of their fishing craft which come upon the vessels with Russians aboard in Cuban coastal waters.

● Mariano Alejandro Rodríguez, age 29, and also from Mariel, was a dispatcher and office employee at the government-controlled Cuban Air Products Company. He managed to flee Cuba via Mexico, and made his way to relatives in Miami. "On October 22, two Soviet ships arrived in the port of Mariel in Pinar del Rio. The Castro regime said they were bringing food and clothing for the victims of hurricane Flora, donated by Russia. This was a lie. One of the ships tied up at the main Mariel docks and unloaded truck trailers and other military hardware. The other tied up at the Thermo-electric Dock and unloaded 39 Stalin tanks and quantities of other war materials. The unloading continued for 72 hours by trusted members of the Castro Rebel Army. All regular dock laborers were rounded up and sent to other areas to work, since the port was heavily guarded and the unloading of the ships done in the strictest secrecy." Rodríguez remained, since his work was necessary to the operation.

Inocente Menoyo García, cousin of Eloy Gutiérrez Menoyo, military leader of the exile activist group Alpha 66-Second Front of the Escambray, fled Cuba last month

with nine others. He states that "thousands of Russians are in Cuba, and in recent months great arms shipments have poured into the country." According to Menoyo and his companions, a Russian ship docked at La Machina Pier in Havana the middle of November where it unloaded plows and civilian trucks carried on deck. "However," Menoyo added, "on November 22 the ship crossed Havana Bay to the Regla docks [which are much less accessible to public view] and spent four days unloading arms and military trucks which were below deck. The arms were placed aboard trailers by all-Soviet work crews and sent east towards Matanzas Province." Menoyo's companions state that other Russian ships have followed the practice of first unloading what appears to be innocent agricultural equipment where it can be seen, the crossing over to Regla to discharge their military burdens. "Among recent shipments," said Menoyo, "were long trailer-trucks with low beds which the Russians use to move missiles. Their cargo is covered with tarpaulins."

● Ignacio Boladeres, age 21, Eloy García, 38, and Antonio Zas Baños, 26, all of Havana Province, upon their escape December 16, gave independent reports of Russian military convoys of 30 truck-trailers each moving into the hilly area near the Havana-Pinar del Rio border. Boladeres described one of the convoys as "bearing long cylindrical weapons." The other two escapees corroborated Boladeres' testimony in independent interviews. Zas Baños states that Russians are not so much in evidence as they used to be, but that "all of the Kohly suburb of Havana is now a Russian colony." There are, he states, "still an enormous number of Russians in Cuba."

● The same constant movement of the Russian military is reported in Camagüey and Oriente Provinces. José Delgado Puga was a reluctant member of Castro's militia until he found his opportunity and defected to the United States the third week of December. Delgado Puga states that Russian troops are being relocated from the cities in mobile units which now dot the countryside:

"Russians have been taken out of the towns and cities and put in camps and small bases," he said. "On a plane trip from Havana to Camagüey when I was a militiaman, I spotted a new Soviet camp with an enormous landing field near the city of Camagüey." He spotted another one near the small town of Santa Cruz del Sur on the south coast of Camagüey. He later was able to ascertain that most of the camps strive to be self-supporting in farm products. "In Ciego de Avila," said Puga, "there is a state farm which is operated entirely by Russians." Puga added that even the farm workers "are Russian peasants who till the soil and gather the crops."

Puga added that "something important in the way of Soviet military activity is going on in Oriente Province. One convoy of 70 trucks and trailers came from the west along the Central Highway and into Oriente Province." His theory, supported by other intelligence, is that the Russians have moved from more conspicuous large bases into much smaller ones which permit combat units to maintain a highly mobile strike capability to intimidate Castro's rebellious population. "While many Soviet technicians have been rotated back to Russia," Puga added, "most of the Soviet troops remain." He is supported in his view by Antonio Peña García, an industrial technician who worked with Bloc technicians. Peña García says: "I was in contact with many Russian technicians in the course of my work. They are rotated every six months in the island, and those that have been leaving are not troops, but so-called agricultural and industrial technicians who no longer

have any real function in this country." The virtual close-down on Cuban industry, and the disastrous condition of agriculture put a term to their speciality.

● Just one example of elaborate underground military construction by the Soviets in Cuba is provided by José Dans Reyes. A resident of Baracoa, Oriente Province, Dans Reyes worked for nearly two years as a stonemason in a forced labor battalion which constructed underground plane hangars in Holguín, also in Oriente Province. He provides the first detailed eyewitness account of underground construction, although scores of reports of such activity have come in over the past 18 months.

Dans Reyes said on December 27: "I worked as a mason's helper on the underground levels prepared for the storage of heavy [bomber and fighter-bomber] military planes. Those of us who were 'slave laborers' worked on the upper levels of the underground construction, while only the Russians were permitted to construct the deeper levels which housed the machinery and more secret details of the construction. Afterwards, Russian planes were moved into these levels. The concrete top is over 80 inches thick, with steel rods for reinforcement which are 2 inches in diameter. It is covered with grass and palm trees for camouflage."

The construction was kept undiscovered Dan Reyes thinks, because the underground hangar was hollowed out, first, from the side of a chalk cliff, then built up inside. It is not known whether the planes are still located in these underground hangars. Nevertheless, it is assumed that other, similar, hangars have also been constructed in other parts of the island.

Dans Reyes was one of a group of 20 Cubans who managed to seize a coastal passenger launch in December and fled the country. The foundering launch was intercepted by the Norwegian vessel Ceara, and its occupants taken to Key West.

● From Varadero Beach on the northern Matanzas coast come other reports of Soviet military activity. Alfredo Luis, one of 8 escapees from the area, spoke for the group: "Soviet troops have moved into the Varadero peninsula in force, and are feverishly constructing military fortifications. They are being constructed from the extreme point of the peninsula back to the channel of Chappalli, a distance of several miles, and consist of a series of Soviet military camps. There is a continuous movement of trucks towing great trailers, tarpaulin covered trucks which carry electronic equipment for the direction of missiles, and several types of cannon. All of this activity is being carried out openly by Soviet-Bloc officers and troops." José Manuel Fernández Toledo, one of the 8 escapees, reports that the interior of Matanzas Province presents the same picture of multiple Soviet military camps of mobile-strike capability. "There is no evidence in Matanzas that the Soviets are pulling out of that area [admitted by Castro himself as one of the areas of greatest anti-Castro resistance]. On the contrary, they are moving in."

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MILITARY CONSCRIPTION REVEALS SERIOUS INTERNAL PROBLEMS

Castro's military conscription of all males between the ages of 17 and 45 is a measure of the successful resistance which has been developed to the regime, over the past two years, by Cuba's urban and rural workers. The Cuban peasant has steadfastly

refused to work, forcing the regime to resort to so-called volunteer labor. Labor chief Lázaro Peña has been hard pressed to keep the rebellious members of the CTC (government labor union) in line. (See "Dissension Inside Big Construction Workers Union," FCN No. 17, October 26, 1963).

Even those impressed into forced labor battalions in the past were admitted by chief of the National Voluntary Work Force, Rigoberto Fernández, to have sabotaged sugar cane crops and Cuba's industrial plant. The seriousness of the problem was underscored by Armed Forces Minister Raúl Castro with the announcement that conscription applied principally to "loafers and bums," terms used to describe those in resistance to the regime. Once conscripted, said Castro, they will be required to harvest this year's crops in work battalions. This, said Fidel Castro's brother, "will rid society of the evils of the past and will [try to] rehabilitate the men."

The Communist newspaper, Hoy, in editorials preceding conscription said: "INRA [Agrarian Reform] enterprises are still a long way from complying with even minimum requirements ... aggravated in recent months by the low productivity of agricultural workers." It cited cases in which "a great amount of rice was lost because a group of laborers quit work...." Managers of state enterprises were included in the attack as "irresponsible... lacking in patriotism," and Hoy said they were being "severely punished!" Underscoring the discontent, on December 6 the Baracoa operator of the official internal radio network radioed Havana: "The coffee pickers say they are not working for patriotism and demand that they be paid."

Commencing on January 1, no one of draft age was permitted to leave the country through the sparse means open to them. While the date for the call-up of conscriptees is set by decree for March 1, the regime immediately set its apparatus of terror and intimidation into high gear. Communist-led cadres of neighborhood informers, called Vigilance Committees, go from house to house, demanding immediate registration. They warned that the last to register will be the first called up to perform forced labor at \$7 a month. Radio stations throughout the country carry the same threats in hourly spot announcements. The result has been panic, an unprecedented flight of Cubans from the island by clandestine means, and a sharp increase in anti-Castro activities.

In one day alone last month 167 Cubans arrived in Florida in seven crowded boats. Of this number, 122 were peasants and fishermen. So great has been the flight to escape slave labor, they say, that all fishing craft have been confiscated to patrol Cuba's coast. Rocket-firing MIG planes and Russian patrol vessels have sunk numbers of tiny craft bearing escapees. The "Ballerina" was sunk in a MIG attack in international waters, and its eight occupants killed or drowned. An unnamed boat was intercepted and sunk by a Russian patrol boat near Faro Lobo, a British possession, and its seven occupants, including three children, lost.

Four youths fled in a 17-foot row boat, and were rescued by an American merchant ship. Antonio Ortega, age 21, describes the terror in Cuba: "The regime is trying to forestall a popular uprising by resort to terror in which they shoot anyone down like a dog for the slightest reason. The Government is as terrified as the people."

Nevertheless, resistance continues in the face of overwhelming odds. Some of this is reflected in the statement of 36 year-old peasant Lázaro Fonseca. He, together with

hundreds of others, was dispossessed of his land to prevent him from supplying and assisting guerrilla bands in the mountains. He said that "the guerrilla bands that operate in the Escambray mountains have caused great damage to the regime, and Castro's militia has been unable to wipe them out, but has attempted to neutralize them."

The militia have shown little stomach for pitched combat with the guerrillas. Former Labor Ministry official Jacinto Fernández, age 31, and a militia member himself indicates that the militia members themselves are disgusted and disillusioned with the regime:

"A surprising number of the militia -- perhaps over 85% of them -- are ruled by terror, deception, and trickery. The regime has been forced to assign political commissars to each squad who threaten them with execution on the spot if they fail to carry out orders. Thousands have been disarmed and sent to production battalions." Fernández adds that "the Cubans are desperate for aid and encouragement from the outside. When it is received, Castro's days are numbered."

There is near-unanimous opinion among recent escapees that as the March deadline for the draft approaches, with it will come greater resistance, and perhaps local uprising. "El Doctor," a leader of Cuba's internal resistance forces, describes the situation in a recent report smuggled out of Havana:

"Ten percent of the population [the Communists] are in power because they have 100% of the support of Communist Russia in arms and munitions. Ninety percent of the Cuban people are kept underfoot because they have not received even 10% assistance or encouragement from the democracies."

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VIGILANCE COMMITTEES REPLACE THE 'MAGI'

Toys for Cuban children for Epiphany January 6 were delivered to them by Vigilance Committees on each block (Epiphany is the traditional gift-giving time in Cuba). First, however, parents were summoned to local Committee headquarters and made to pay for a toy for each child in the household. The selection was limited to a wooden truck with an anti-aircraft gun, a small wooden cart, and a small China doll. Graciela Torres Hernández describes the operation as it unfolded in her small town of La Panchita located on the north coast of Las Villas Province.

"Starting December 18, the Vigilance Committees of La Panchita called the parents to their offices, one by one. We were told to make a selection, one cheap toy for each child, and made to pay for them. The parents then were given a specific hour to bring the children to the Committee offices on Epiphany. Committee members said they would give them the gifts, together with a lecture that the Three Kings of Epiphany never existed, and were only an imperialist lie. They told the children that the toys had been provided by Fidel Castro, and that he had permitted their parents to present them on his behalf."

Mrs. Torres Hernández didn't wait for Epiphany. She fled with her fisherman husband and four children in a small boat which was picked up near the British possession of Key Sal by a merchant vessel. They spent Christmas in the United States.

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'EDUCATION' IN CASTRO'S CUBA

Resolution 5526 issued by the Ministry of Education decrees obligatory Communist instruction from the first grade onward. Recognition that Communist instruction has met with the resistance of Cuba's teachers is contained in that part of the resolution which provides for "the transfer of school principals, inspectors, and teachers when their work represents an obstacle to the fulfillment of Socialist education." Education Minister Armando Hart has been forced, by his own admissions in statements since last August, to discharge and to punish 1,000 Cuban teachers by withdrawing their ration cards.

"It is an easy matter to state that indoctrination has not been assimilated by Cuban youth." The speaker is 61 year-old Sinesio Villanueva, a career schoolteacher from Marianao, a suburb of Havana. "During the first year of Castro's regime," said Villanueva, "the children liked to be called Fidelistas. The following year, it was becoming a vile word to them. Since then, it has become an outright insult."

Villanueva points to the fact that Vigilance Committees have been ordered to crack down on parents who choose to teach their children at home rather than send them to school. The father is docked a day's pay for each day his child is absent from school, and Vigilance Committees inspect to see that a school attendance card is signed each Friday by the teacher and is endorsed by the parents. While some parents do not demur from sending children to these schools, they generally are representative of the lower moral classes who expect to extract some position or advantage in the Communist society. In short, they are the "resentful fringe" of society who form the backbone of marginal public support for Castro and Communism.

Reasons for student and parent resistance are related by Charles Fernández, former rural school teacher from Yaguajay, Las Villas Province:

"In rural school 18 where I taught, no Cuban history was allowed, and all text books have been eliminated. The school is run by a so-called Mural Commission made up of Communist Party members. This Commission selects themes for each day's teaching from Communist newspapers and magazines. This passes for civics courses. The Commission selects paragraphs from Castro's History Will Absolve Me, which is his Mein Kampf. Students are required to recite all the proper names contained in the paragraph. That passes for grammar courses. There simply is nothing resembling an education in Cuba today."

Fernández's daughters, Graziela 22, and Nancy 20, are examples of Castro's teachers. Neither finished high school. They were among the legion of youngsters who, having finished their sixth grade of education, were given a six-month indoctrination course and assigned as teachers. (See "Twelve-year-olds Replace Cuban Teachers," FCN No. 12, August 17, 1963.) They fled with their father in December. With regard to peasant children at her school, Nancy said:

In September alone, 2,500 tons of arms were used in 62 trips on the inter-island ferry "Cacique." Steward José Valero Aguirre overheard conversations by Russian and Cuban officers classifying the Isle of Pines as a staging area to send arms to Latin American terrorists. Dock worker Benjamin Torrerosa from the islet's principal city of Nueva Gerona, stated that arms shipments "were off-loaded by Russians and selected militia onto 16-wheel trailer trucks and sent to the Russian base at the Bay of Sigüanea. Members of the militia say freely that the arms are for their 'companeros' (Communists) in Latin America. Former militia supply chief on the Isle of Pines, Aguedo Borrego, said on December 13 that "these shipments are not needed by the militia on the Isle, because all of them are supplied with every conceivable weapon." "Undoubtedly," said Borrego, "they are trans-shipped to Latin America."

Helmsman of the ship "Rio Damují," Lorgio Lajara Padrón, left his vessel and sought asylum in Vera Cruz, Mexico, the middle of December. He said in an interview: "The Cuban ships Camilo Cienfuegos, Aracelio Iglesias, Frank País, and González Lines, have been used many times to carry arms to Communist guerrillas in the Caribbean and northern South America."

In many cases the arms are transferred on the high seas to small boats and fishing vessels which then run the contraband to the sparsely guarded coastlines of the Latin American countries. Others interviewed believe that Russian torpedo boats "exceptionally fast, with quiet engines" are involved in Latin American gun-running. They place the number of these boats stationed near Sigüanea as "between 25 and 30," and note that no fishing craft or other vessels are permitted within 10 miles of the coast.

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