

Mambises in times of coronavirus

The internationalist spirit of Mambi General Henry Reeve is present today in the Cuban medical brigades that combat the dangerous global pandemic of the new coronavirus. **Photo:** Granma Archive

Author: [René González Barrios](#) | internet@granma.cu

April 4, 2020 01:04:35

Translated and edited by Walter Lippmann for CubaNews.

As Fidel asserted on July 26, 1978: “Internationalism is the most beautiful essence of Marxism-Leninism and its ideals of solidarity and brotherhood among peoples. Without internationalism, the Cuban Revolution would not even exist. To be an internationalist is to pay our own debt to humanity”.

I have a permanent habit of linking day to day with the history of our pro-independence feat. From the beautiful and turbulent contest, from the glorious epic of our mambises, men, women, old people and children of those times, who without solid political and ideological training practiced solidarity and humanism, moments of sincere commitments and inspiration are born, which they feed the spirit.

When on the morning of March 17 the cruise ship MS Braemar of the British line Fred Olsen entered the waters of Mariel Bay, in the province of Artemisa, my first thought was for the English mambises. He recalled that, among the more than 3,000 insurgents born in other lands, about twenty were British, two of them lieutenant colonels of the necessary war: John W. Caldwell Smidt and Herbert Acton Clews. Those men left everything, family and property, to fight for our independence, like the English expeditionaries of the Virginius steamer, shot in Santiago de Cuba, in 1873.



Looking at the list of the nationality of the tourists: Canadians, Belgians, Dutch, Colombians, Irish, Italians, Japanese, Australians, New Zealanders, Norwegians and Swedes, I meditated that, from most of those nations, there were fighters in our Liberation Army.

Canadians were Brigadier Washington Alberto Claudio Ryan, one of the intrepid leaders of the Camaguey cavalry along with Ignacio Agramonte, expeditionary of the Virginius, also shot in Santiago de Cuba, on November 4, 1873, Lt. Col. Joseph Napoleón Chableaux, died in fights on August 30, 1897, during the capture of Las Tunas, and Charles Huntington, also killed in combat against a Spanish guerrilla in 1897, in the territory of Camagüey.

Colombia would send the Hornet expedition to the Great War, with more than 40 combatants from that country, among which was the later division general of the Liberation Army José Rogelio Castillo and Zúñiga, a man from Baraguá. In 95, two Colombians would command Cuban forces as generals: Avelino Rosas Córdova, division general, and Adolfo Peña Rodríguez, brigadier general, both imbued with the Latin American spirit of Lieutenant General Antonio Maceo.

There were also Belgian, Dutch and Irish mambises.

Italy, where today a brigade of Cuban doctors is fighting for life, contributed an important contingent of mambises, among which are the figures of Colonel Orestes Ferrara, member of the General Staff of Generalissimo Máximo Gómez; Lieutenant Colonel Gerardo Hugo Ricci, who fought in Matanzas, and the doctor and commander Francisco Federico Falco, all of whom were fighters for the Martí war.

He remembered the Italian mambises of the Great War, and Captain Natalio Argenta, the fiery poet and musician, Garibaldi's soldier, who came to Cuba on an expedition with Brigadier Pío Rosado, and who, after being a prisoner, died shot in Bayamo, on July 7, 1880, during the Little War, not without screaming at the top of his lungs at his executioners: "Long live the Universal Republic!"

That same humanist cry was what led Céspedes to proclaim, on October 10, 1868, that "Cuba aspires to be a great and civilized nation to extend a friendly arm and a brotherly heart to all other peoples"; to Martí, affirming that "Homeland is Humanity"; to Máximo Gómez, in a historic letter to Captain General Ramón Blanco Erenas, "I only believe in one race: humanity", and to the Bronze Titan Antonio Maceo, in his integrative and antillanista thought, dream of founding "the Cuban Federation, Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo ».

Saving the crew and tourists from the British cruise was a gesture of gratitude and commitment to our history.

When we see our Health brigades depart to offer their solidarity aid to other nations, the success of our Commander-in-Chief in creating the International Contingent of Doctors Specialized in Disaster Situations and Serious Epidemics Henry Reeve comes to mind inexorably. Its name alone honors one of the most altruistic, modest and disciplined leaders of the Liberation Army, born in New York, a day like today 170 years ago, and with him, all foreigners who, during our struggles for independence and in All our history, they saw and made the sovereign cause of the Cuban people their own.

The fact that the majority of the members of the Cuban brigades fighting today covid-19 in the world are women, reminds me of Lila Waring, the New York wife of Colonel and Liberation Army doctor Emilio Lorenzo Luaces, whom during two years she accompanied as a nurse in the hospitals of the Cuban manigua, during the Ten Years War. She, under very hostile conditions, cured Cubans, the same as the Colombian Mercedes Sirven, the woman who, with the rank of Commander of the Liberation Army in the War of '95, from the health service, directed, in her capacity as a pharmacist, hospitals of blood in the insurgent territory of the Oriente province.

In times of coronavirus, Juan Padrón, a mambí from head to toe, left us, who, reflecting international solidarity in our quests for independence, accompanied the symbolic and endearing colonel Valdés, a Russian mambí, an Englishman, an Italian and a Chinese. On December 5, 1988, in the Plaza de la Revolución, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz expressed that "whoever is not capable of fighting for others will never be able to fight for himself."

In that humanistic and solidary spirit, born from the roots of our own history, our people have been forged, capable of feeling as their own the vicissitudes of all the inhabitants of the Earth. It is a moral pandemic deeply rooted in Cuban culture and idiosyncrasy, which does not need a cure, but expansion.



Mambises in times of coronavirus

As Fidel asserted on July 26, 1978: «Internationalism is the most beautiful essence of Marxism-Leninism and its ideals of solidarity and brotherhood among peoples. Without internationalism, the Cuban Revolution would not even exist. To be an internationalist is to pay our own debt to humanity »

Author: [René González Barrios](mailto:internet@granma.cu) | internet@granma.cu

April 4, 2020 01:04:35

Translated and edited by Walter Lippmann for CubaNews.



