Coronet
July, 1960: p. 111

"A revolution gone wrong"

BY ANDREW ST. GEORGE

A reporter who lived in the hills with Fidel Castro tells the story of how an idealistic revolution turned into one of the great tragedies of our time

THESE DAYS, EVERYONE GREETS ME the same way: "What do you think of Castro *now*?"

It's not an unreasonable question. During Cuba's two-year armed insurrection, I spent more time in the field with Fidel Castro than any other reporter - over six months. I went back five times to the hills, once crash-landing a small red and white Piper in a hillside tomato patch. My visits delighted Castro. But I had a two year old son (whose middle name is *Fidel*) and I had hardly ever seen him.

"Ah, Andrews," boomed Fidel, on one occasion, mispronouncing my name in a rush of affection, "I will be your son's godfather. We'll baptize him in the Church of the Angels when we win. Then you will come and bring your family to Havana."

I still spend a good deal of time in Cuba, but my family (which joined

In April 1959, grateful Castro decorated author with high Cuban medal.

me there briefly after the revolution) has returned to unrebellious Westchester County, New York.

This is not to say that Castro and I are no longer fond of each other. The chief of the police has orders to turn me loose whenever I'm arrested for taking pictures—six times during February and March.

Last March, I dashed up with my cameras to a midnight fight between Communists and Catholic students among the elm trees of the *Plaza Central*, only to be collared by a police corporal with a huge turkey-leg pistol. "March with me," the corporal said, "to the commissariat." At the corner of the park, a flock of teenage boys, barely out of the lower grades of high school, surrounded us. Military intelligence agents, they carried submachine guns and carbines with homemade pistol grips.

"This *hombre* is a foreigner," they told my corporal. "We have jurisdic-

tion over foreigners."

By this time the mob was ten deep around us, and there were cries of "*Let's finish off the son of a dog right here!*"

The corporal steered me through the growling crowd with the barrel of his gun. When we got to the Third Precinct, I felt grateful to be in his hands.

One of the most terrifying experiences of my life happened in front of the Presidential Palace, under the North Terrace where I once stood with Fidel on the night of his triumphant entry into Havana. Trying to photograph a rioting mob rocking a loud-speaker truck, I was half-carried, half-dragged around the *Plaza*. Men and women swung at me wildly. A police sergeant and a fast-moving Army officer dumped me head first into the back of an Army jeep. "Another minute or two," the driver said, "and we would be carrying your corpse back here."

Actually, I have been luckier than most newsmen who covered the Cuban revolution. Many of them have rapidly fallen into disfavor with the Castro Government.

As a line to the outside world, I was helpful to the revolution when dictator Fulgencio Batista was still on top. My reports—and the reports of others—were reprinted time and again and became the rebels' most important publicity. I had freedom to go where I wanted and to write what I pleased. But when the revolution triumphed, its leaders had no further use for foreign newsmen.

My life grew more difficult. My phone functioned fitfully, requiring peculiar repairs and wiring. Over-

night I became an "imperialist agent," instead of an honored hero of the revolution. Today, newsmen from the *other* side: Russians, Czechs, Bulgarians, Red Chinese—are inaugurating a new cycle as the "Heroic Correspondents of Our Anti-Imperialist Struggle."

My warm wartime friendship with Fidel would seem to be dead and forgotten, but that is not so. Fidel has found it difficult to forget the only magazine article he ever wrote, which appeared in CORONET, in February 1958, under the title, "Why We Fight."

What Fidel wrote could almost be considered a preamble to the revolution. It was reprinted in six Latin American countries, in 11 different publications. In Cuba, teams of young men from the Greater Havana Action and Sabotage Section of the Castro underground spent grinding hours turning out thousands of mimeographed copies which were circulated clandestinely.

Recently, the article has been reappearing in the Cuban press, as a reminder of Castro campaign promises that have gone unfulfilled and ignored. One daily ran it front-page center, mutely bordered in black.

Castro, in the article, spoke of a "reluctance to enter the presidential competition." So he abolished elections and hand-picked a stooge for the presidency. He promised "full and untrammeled freedom of information for all communication media." But after he came to power newspapers and broadcasting stations that criticized the Government became true communications media only when, one by one, the Government took them over. He wrote "we

ment took them over. He wrote "we have no plans for the expropriation or nationalization of foreign investments." True, planning has been haphazard—but Cuban and foreign investment alike *is* being expropriated and nationalized.

The CORONET article has become a haunting image of the early high principles of a revolution that is unmistakably going wrong. Yet he has never repudiated it.

Many of Fidel's headlong plunges into radicalism are beginning to bear dire consequences, but none more so than his fanatic, nationalistic "war" against the U.S.A.

In Cuba, millions of dollars and man-hours are spent on making this "war" the chief national endeavor. I have watched it grow from an almost imperceptible trickle into a sea of trouble.

Some of my best friends, gallant leaders of the anti-Batista insurrection, are in the Cuban equivalent of Siberian exile. Humberto Sori Marin, a brilliant lawyer; Commander Crescencio Perez, once Fidel's right arm in the hills; Jorge Enrique Sotus of the famed *cinco capitanes,* are among those in jail or in disfavor. There are many others.

All these men have been shoved aside by Fidel for a single reason: they would not compromise with the Communists.

In November 1957, I stood near a Cuban rebel forward post on La Mesa Hill, chatting with the commanding officer, Ernesto Guevara, an Argentine physician known as "El Che," who is now one of Cuba's most powerful men. We were talking of a friend, Captain Ciro Re-

dondo, who had died in action a few days earlier.

"A real loss," said El Che. "When he came up here, Ciro wasn't a revolutionary, just a *Fidelista.* But up here, we were making him into a revolutionary."

That *Fidelistas* required El Che's indoctrination to be considered revolutionaries was significant news. Most informed observers now agree that Fidel's decision, halfway through the mountain war, to give El Che and his younger brother Raul Castro independent area commands was a fundamental mistake. As a result, when the revolution triumphed, Che and Raul controlled private armies much larger than Fidel's own force. Moreover, unlike Fidel's own happy-go-lucky outfit, these were politically indoctrinated troops.

There has been much guessing as to whether Raul Castro and Che Guevara are *bona fide* Communists. I happen to know that neither is a party member. But the thinking of both is described by Che's remark:

"The Communist philosophy is nearest to me."

Ernesto Guevara, a darkly handsome young man, has nursed a hatred for Western democracy from his teens. "I was for Hitler during the World War," Che once told me. "He fought the British, didn't he?"

By far the most bitterly remembered shock of Che's student days concerns a huge, drunken American sailor who tried to steal his girl at a Buenos Aires beer garden dance. "When I tried to get up," Guevara recalls, still affected by the experience after ten years, "he put his hand on my head and pushed me

down. I could not get up, no matter how I struggled, nor could I reach him. The waiters finally had to get him away."

Raul Castro has undergone no such traumatic experience. While still in his teens he volunteered to fight alongside U.S. troops in Korea. (He was turned down, probably because of his youth.) But during the last five years, Raul has become convinced that, "The principal enemy of Cuba is the United States," and adds, "If I have to choose between capitalism and communism, I won't choose capitalism."

On April 15, 1959, Fidel Castro left for a three-week tour of the U.S. and Latin America. While Commander Sergio Sanjegui, chief of operations of Army Intelligence, was busy with the security details of Fidel's trip, a lieutenant from Raul Castro's headquarters walked into his office and handed him a note of

Turning on "Fidel's friend," Communist-led mob mauled St. George near Cuba's Presidential Palace last November. Only quick police action saved his life.

three typed lines: "*Turn in your credentials, your gun and your uniform. You have been removed as Chief of Operations, G-2, and discharged from the Revolutionary Army.*" It was signed by Raul Castro.

Seizing the tactical advantage of Fidel's trip, Raul purged over 30 senior officers from the Army and the police. Rapidly he consolidated his hold over Cuba's armed forces. The most principled anti-Communist flag officer, Commander Huber Matos, was sent to prison with 35 of his staff officers; shortly afterward, the last wholeheartedly *Fidelista* officer in a top command post, the popular Army Chief of Staff Camilo Cienfuegos, vanished.

When Cienfuegos disappeared in his small plane last October, there was nothing to link his disappearance with Raul or El Che. My conclusion still is that Cienfuegos was the victim of a tragic accident. But his disappearance revealed that he had had deep differences with Raul over Communist infiltration in the Army, and with Che over the role of Communists in the Nicaraguan and Haitian exile movements. Both in the Cuban Army and in the exile groups, Raul and Che backed the Communists; Camilo gave open support to known anti-Communists.

Startlingly, it came to light that a hidden struggle was going on between the Cuban nationalists—known as "Friends of Cuba"—and the Communists, called "Friends of China," in Castro's own revolutionary Army. The "Friends of China," masters of intrigue, had surrounded Cienfuegos on all sides at the time of his disappearance. Cienfuegos' own

Army chief of Intelligence was Raul-appointed Communist Ramiro Valdez, who always wore a Russian fur cap because, although it made him sweat, "It helps me think right."

But, perhaps Castro's greatest mistake has been his decision to reach for the leadership of the Communist-backed Left Opposition throughout Latin America. This has brought Cuba into ominous alliances with subversive groups in every Latin country, from Mexico to Ecuador.

Tragically, Castro probably does have the timbre of a great new Latin leader—the irresistible personality, the instinct for timely social reform, the sure touch with the masses. But as the result of his mistakes, Fidel Castro does not even rule Cuba today. Cuba is run by a triumvirate—Fidel, Raul and El Che. A combination of any two members can box in the third, even if that third happens to be Fidel.

Raul and El Che have convinced Fidel that U.S. power is on the wane and that his only chance for Pan-American leadership is through a close political alliance with the Communist parties of the hemisphere.

Raul and El Che control the flow of military and political intelligence to Fidel, the former through Military Intelligence Chief Ramiro Valdez, the latter through Castro's chief political informant, the bitterly anti-U.S. Jorge Ricardo Masetti, who is director of a new Cuban propaganda agency, *Prensa Latina*.

However, Raul and El Che are not mere wire-pullers; they are dedicated, incredibly hard-working men, who like to joke that "We're going to get up an hour earlier tomorrow, so we can work 25 hours a day."

REVOLUTION GONE WRONG

They keep Fidel persuaded that U.S. officials are plotting against the Cuban revolutionary regime.

A YEAR AND A HALF after Castro took power, Havana is a hive of Communist and Communist-front activity. Moreover, to keep himself in the limelight, to keep the title of leader, to keep his own Cuban people united and militarized, Castro has launched his furious political and economic war against the U.S.

"We're riding a train without brakes," groaned a prominent Havana journalist to me recently.

It is hinted these days that Castro acts as if he were Napoleon, that perhaps he is crazy. But the only psychiatrist ever allowed near him, a tall, elegant Latin American-born lady doctor, who was trained in the U.S. and is now practicing psychiatry in New York City, claims he's nothing of the sort.

"Fidel has unquestionably superior intelligence," she says, "good judgment, superb memory. He is a deeply anxiety-ridden man, very fearful of rejection, a syndrome that seems to go back to his earliest childhood, when his father Angel (a wealthy sugar planter) reportedly neither accepted nor acknowledged him, and his mother Lina (who had been employed in his father's house), I suppose, generally rejected him. This still disturbs his relations with other people on a personal level. It makes stability a difficult thing to achieve, when anything permanent, anything established or ordered must remind him of childhood's emotional disappointments."

As a Freudian afterthought she

adds musingly: "It is my suspicion that his mother refused to breast-feed him."

The truth is, however, that Fidel even upset the established order of patient-psychiatrist relationship; instead of falling in love with *her*, as is customary, it was *she* who fell in love with her bearded patient.

"It was a brief romance," says the psychiatrist, coolly, "it's all over now."

Yet many of Fidel's actions are probably influenced by an anxiety over a danger that is close at hand.

For all their fraternal front, the shadow of violence has never left the Cuban revolution's three new rulers.

In 1957, when the small *Fidelista* landing force was scattered by Batista troops on its arrival from Mexico, Fidel, Raul and El Che were separated. Each took to the bush accompanied by one or two companions. And the Batista Government began spreading the rumor that Fidel had been killed or had surrendered.

"When the radio said Fidel had surrendered," Raul once recounted, matter-of-factly, "I made up my mind to kill him if he had betrayed the revolution."

Later, when I repeated Raul's remark to Fidel, he said, thoughtfully: "Yes, Raul would do anything for the revolution."

There are clear signs that Fidel is concerned with the prospect of sudden, violent death. When, last July, I flew to Camaguey with him in his private plane, he was startled by the sight of flames belching from the engine exhausts during warmup. The

steward tried to reassure him that this was a common sight, but Fidel was worried. He ordered the engines stopped and questioned the sweating pilot for ten minutes before he allowed the plane to take off.

But unless he *is* killed—and there are those who say that his lungs and tongue would have to be clubbed to death separately—Fidel Castro will remain, as one observer put it: "A fact, a Cuban reality . . . the one man to whom Cubans have given their mandate to conduct a social revolution."

There is little chance of Castro's Government being removed, or even seriously shaken, by political opposition. The economy is groaning under the many shifts and changes. But it is by no means paralyzed. It may even go into higher gear under the impact of open and concealed Soviet technical aid.

Whatever may be said of its political integrity, the Castro regime is the first financially honest government in Cuba's history. Some of his top officials, like Dr. Rene Vallejo, agrarian reform director for vast Oriente Province, manage hundreds of millions of dollars worth of property without owning more than $50 worth of personal effects.

Fidel's offhand way with money is symptomatic of the personal way he runs the Government.

"We were talking about setting up some fishing cooperatives," Dr. Vallejo told me, "and Fidel said, 'Look, I'll give you 1,000,000 pesos for that —no, maybe I better give you 2,000,000—see what you can get started.' He reached into the left breast of his tunic for his chewed-up

Banco Continental checkbook, and right there on the jeep fender he wrote me a check with his driver's ball-point pen for 2,000,000 'cocos.' When Fidel came down about ten days later, he asked me casually what I'd done with the money. I told him it was still in my desk. 'Well, spend it, *viejo*, spend it, that's what it's for,' Fidel told me impatiently."

Such innocence has hugely strengthened Fidel's popularity with the masses of Cubans, who have grown tired of financially nimble politicians. At times, the depth of Fidel's popular support is shown in unexpected, touching ways. In the Havana Hilton, where the staff knows me, my clothes used to return from the hotel's dry-cleaning shop with slips of paper tucked into the pockets: "BE A GOOD JOURNALIST ALWAYS SPEAK TRUE OF CUBA THANK YOU GOD BLESS YOU."

"Castro is a better crowd manipulator than either Hitler or Nasser," says a correspondent who has seen all three. But Castro displays, even in difficult moments, a lack of personal cruelty; he has little of the repressive, repulsive harshness of the cartoon tyrant he is often made out to be.

When, not long ago, someone pleaded with Castro for a fellow-revolutionary, whom he had sent to prison for seven-and-a-half years, Castro began to count on his fingers worriedly: "How much time has he already spent in jail? Three months? Well, if he was given seven-and-a-half years, he must spend at least six or seven months in jail before we can think of letting him go."

REVOLUTION GONE WRONG

But, "Make no mistake, this is a dictatorship," says a U.S.-schooled Havana lawyer, who was once a fervent Castro partisan. "We have terror in Cuba. It's *not* violent terror, *not* gunfire in the streets. It's in the decrees and statutes that could send a man to prison and to a secret firing wall for opposing the Government in any way at all. This terror is not being applied—yet. But it's here, written into law, waiting for the opposition to use real violence. Then, the roundups and executions . . . it'll be like anti-landlord week in Red China."

Many observers claim that revolutionary Cuba is a "dictatorship with a difference." Jean-Paul Sartre, the French writer and philosopher, who passed through Cuba recently, remarked, "The system seems to function this way: the people are confused; Fidel appears and tells the people what they want; the people decide Fidel is right. But what happens when Fidel is no longer around?" People who know Cuba respond by shaking their heads in terrified anticipation.

However, during the first year and a half of *Fidelismo*, Cuba has made enormous strides of progress. Fidel has given the humble poor of Cuba new hope for the future. He has given them a windfall of roads, schools and hospitals. From one end of the island to the other, the concrete never sets on Fidel's many public works.

Deep in the foothills of the Sierra Maestra, 100 miles from the nearest township, a sleek, modern school city is being built to accommodate 20,000 of the poorest peasant chil-

dren—one of the most improbable sights I've ever seen. But in this school (still under construction, it has about 500 pupils at present) children live and work under bellowing military drill instructors. They march to class and to communal meals in obedient step. Their curriculum, split between field work and study, seems patterned after the Chinese Communist concept. No wonder that, in spite of the many military buildings turned over for educational use, Castro's critics mutter scornfully: "Yes, he's turning the barracks into schools, but he's turning the schools into barracks."

This split impression, divided between good and bad, is highly typical of everything Castro has done so far. One of the effects has been to divide the American Hemisphere as it has not been divided over any single issue in decades. In fact, the impact of Castro's revolution has even divided people here at home.

Jack Paar spoke up for Castro, but Ed Sullivan turned against him. Joe Louis is a Fidel fan, but Jackie Robinson refused an invitation to Havana. Ernest Hemingway considers Castro a colleague in beards and admires him greatly, but Tennessee Williams no longer does. Former President Harry Truman thinks Fidel should get a shave and a new suit; Adlai Stevenson says he ought to get more sleep.

My feelings are deeply divided about my friend Fidel. I still have great personal admiration for him. But I am alarmed and appalled by what has been happening to Cuba.

However, if Fidel recognizes his

mistakes before it's too late, he and his country may still have a great future.

What I wonder is what Fidel—and Raul, and El Che, with whom I marched shoulder by shoulder through many moonless nights—will say to me when I return to Cuba. ●