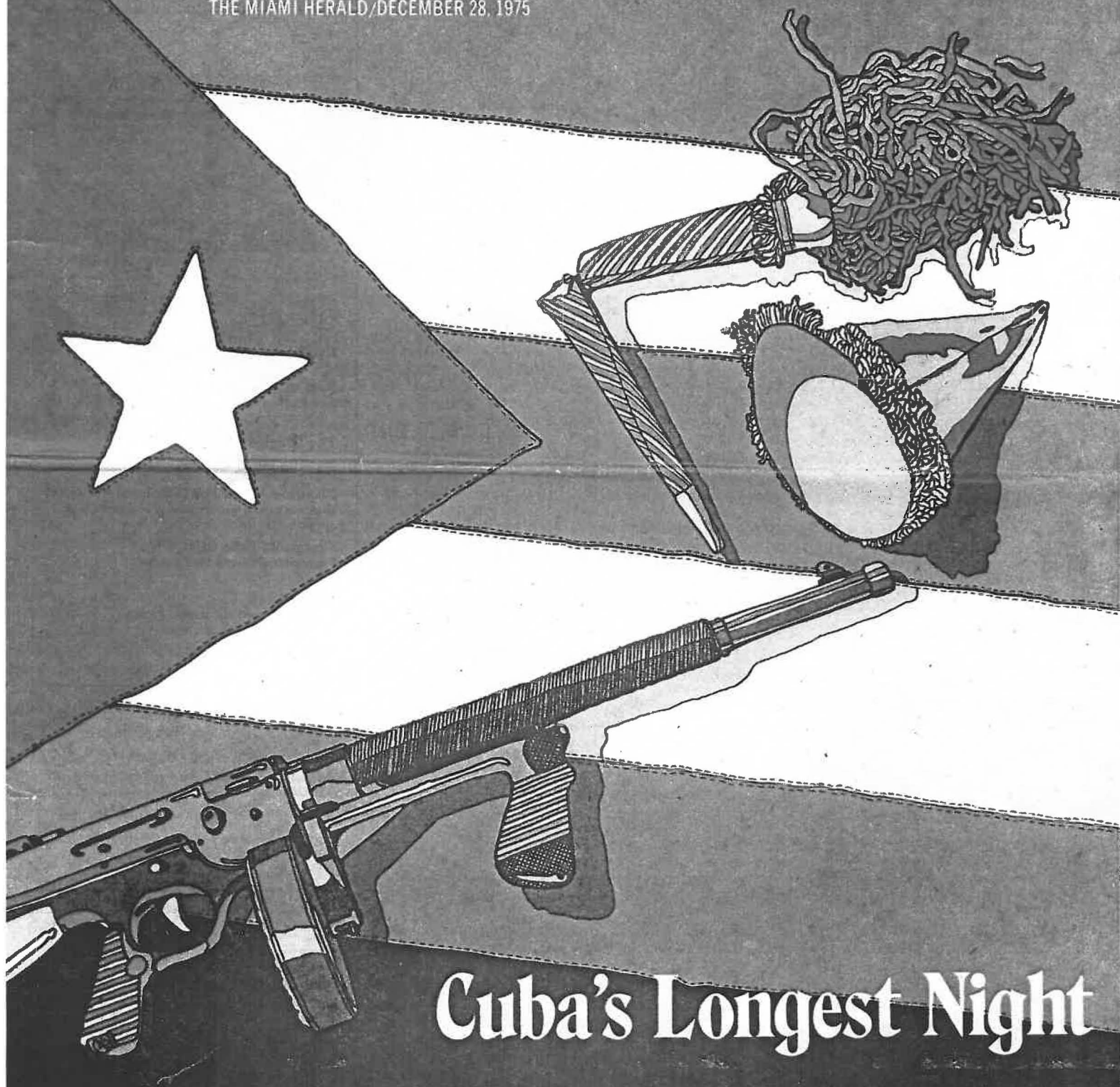
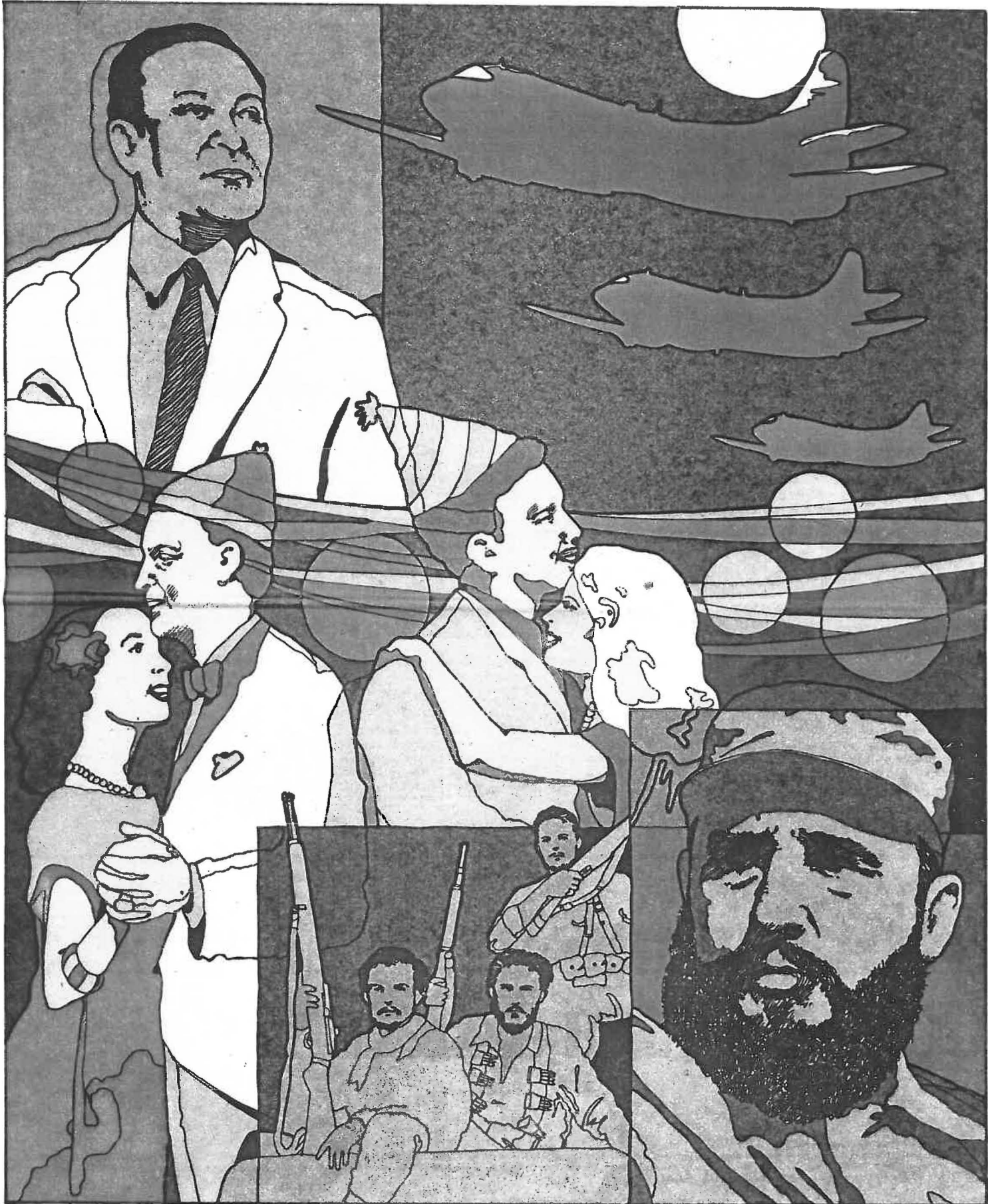


TROPIC

THE MIAMI HERALD/DECEMBER 28, 1975



Cuba's Longest Night



New Year's Eve, 1958

The Longest Night

Fidel Castro was chatting with Errol Flynn. A CIA man was authorizing arms for the rebels. A teenager named Rosa dreamed of love, and millions of Cubans were going to year-end parties. Here, in the first of two parts, Tropic re-creates the dramatic hours which began the migration of 750,000 Cubans to the United States

By John Dorschner
And Roberto Fabricio

Through the nighttime air, they sped, three DC-4s, fanning out from the fog-shrouded military airfield in Havana, racing through a Caribbean cold front on a moonlit night, carrying passengers who were fleeing for their lives.

To the Dominican Republic went one, with Cuban strongman Fulgencio Batista, his wife and the island's political leaders. To Jacksonville went another, with the heads of the police and the military. To New Orleans went a third, with Batista children, minor officials and relatives.

Inside the planes was a funereal silence. Some women were still dressed in formal gowns. Many of the men had guns. Few had time to bring anything else. For most, the departure had been shockingly swift. It was a night, thought one passenger, when the hours seemed like minutes, and the minutes seemed like hours.

Behind them, on an island where six million people were going to sleep after celebrating the arrival of the New Year, two men sat alone in an office at Camp Columbia.

One was Gen. Eulogio Cantillo, the new chief of the armed forces. The other was Carlos Manuel Piedra, an old man who was slowly realizing that, as the senior judge of the Supreme Court, he was the constitutionally designated successor to the presidency.

"Well, Mr. President," said General Cantillo, "what do we do now?"

"Well, General," replied the judge, "what do we do now?"

It was the early morning hours of Jan. 1, 1959, and the pendulum of Cuban politics was about to swing from a right-wing dictatorship to the establishment of the first Communist government in the Western Hemisphere.

To Americans, the events of that long night are known mostly from the highly fictionalized version in the movie *The Godfather — Part II*. To Cubans, many of the events, even today, are clouded in *bolos* — rumors.

What did happen, exactly? Why did Batista flee? How did Fidel Castro seize power so swiftly? To reconstruct the situation which occurred 17 years ago this week, *Tropic* interviewed 40 persons — Batista officials, rebel leaders, American diplomats, ordinary Cubans. For many of them, including the former offi-

cial, it was the first time they had talked about it for publication.

Those closest to the situation say that, by late December, they knew Batista's government was near collapse. The strongman's two bulwarks — the U.S. government and the Cuban military — had abandoned him. The fighting was still 165 miles from Havana, but the rebels were gaining ground almost at will. In the minds of Batista leaders loomed the specter of the fall of the Machado dictatorship during two bloody days in August 1933, when at least 1,000 officials and policemen had been slaughtered on the streets of Havana.

Such fears were completely absent from the news on Dec. 31. In fact, both Cuban and American media were echoing government reports that the rebels were being routed from Las Villas province. Thus, in Havana the 1.3 million residents sensed only a slight aura of tension. Most were preparing for a traditional, if subdued, celebration, with the midnight ritual of the eating of the 12 grapes, one by one, to commemorate the passing of the old, and the beginning of the new. . .

At age 57, Fulgencio Batista had learned to live with the threat of violence without showing fear.

On the morning of Dec. 31, he was in the Presidential Palace, sitting in the room where, 18 months before, he had led his bodyguards in repulsing a suicidal attack by 60 young revolutionaries carrying sub-machine guns.

Wearing a burgundy bathrobe and sipping a mild coffee, he was following his daily routine: reading *Diario de la Marina* and then scanning the headlines in the other newspapers.

At 11 a.m., he summoned Cosme Varas, a 34-year-old aide de camp, and asked him to invite government leaders to a midnight gathering at his Camp Columbia home. Batista wanted a subdued affair. No dancing, no formal meal. Just a buffet and coffee, perhaps with a little brandy thrown in.

Varas started making phone calls. No one refused the invitation, and no one asked questions. The Columbia party had become a New Year's Eve tradition with Batista. Only one person could not be located: Rafael Guas Inclan, the vice president. Varas made many phone calls trying to trace the man. He was somewhere in the hills, evidently, hunting deer.

After noon, Batista bathed, put on a gray

business suit and ate a late breakfast. About 3 p.m., he announced he was going to Kuquine, his hacienda outside Havana.

Cosme Varas went with him. As usual, the limousine was accompanied by two cars loaded with bodyguards. Along the route, other agents of the military police, SIM, checked possible trouble spots.

At Kuquine, Batista worked alone in the library wing for a while, until he was joined by his two closest aides: Andres Domingo Morales del Castillo, the presidential secretary, and Dr. Gonzalo Guell, the prime minister.

At 6:30 p.m., Batista talked by phone with Brig. Gen. Francisco (Silito) Tabernilla, the 39-year-old son of the chief of the armed forces who doubled as Batista's main military aide and as chief of the Havana infantry.

The phone call was brief. Batista wanted Silito to come to Kuquine at 7:30 p.m. "Bring my passport," said Batista. "And bring the list."

Silito knew what he meant. He had been carrying that list with him everywhere for the past nine days. Batista had dictated it to him on Dec. 22 in the downstairs office of the presidential home at Camp Columbia. It listed the names of people who would flee with him "just in case we have to go."

At the same time, Batista had ordered Silito's brother, Carlos (Winse) Tabernilla, chief of the air force, to move three civilian passenger planes to Camp Columbia's airfield, ready to take off at a moment's notice.

When they had made the list, Batista had said it was important that no one be told about it. The president did not have to mention the bloodbath following Machado's overthrow. Silito understood.

More than 500 miles to the east of Havana, the 28th-of-July rebels were in a festive mood. After two years of struggling for survival in the mountains, they were now relaxing in Palma Soriano, a city of 75,000 overlooking Santiago. The townspeople had welcomed them openly.

Dr. Raul Chibas, a Castro major, sat in an open-air cafe. Sipping coffee and smoking a cigar, he chatted with Maj. Jose Quevedo, chief of the government's army units in the area. Quevedo had just defected to the rebels.

At a nearby table, Fidel Castro was talking to Errol Flynn. Flynn was spending a few days with the rebels, soaking up the atmosphere, briefly sharing their romantic life.

Castro told Flynn that he had 2,500

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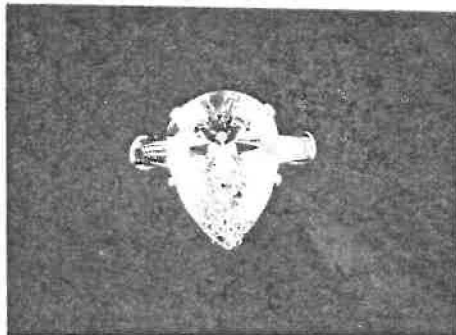
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NIGHT

Continued

guerrillas fighting on three fronts. The battles were going well. What bothered him was not the war, but the peace. Political machinations were occurring in Havana, and he had no control over them. Perhaps a junta would seize power and thwart the revolution. Perhaps Batista would flee, going into exile with his millions without having to face the firing squad Castro had planned for him. What could be done? Maybe Castro mulled, he should rush a column of Oriente guerrillas to Havana.

Conversation stopped. It was time for the news on the Batista-controlled radio station. "Things are quiet and everything is under control in Oriente," said the announcer.

The rebels laughed.

In the library of his Havana home, president-elect Andres Rivero Agüero was working. Like many Batista associates, he was born into a poor family. An orphan at seven, a student who had worked his way through the Havana Law School, a politician who owed much to Batista, he was now preparing for his inauguration, scheduled for Feb. 24.

The statistics in front of him showed that the taxes on real estate and corporate income were projected to produce \$200 million for the government. But only \$12 million had been collected during the last year. The reason for the discrepancy, he knew, had to be that tax collectors "and other higher ups" were accepting bribes. Was there a way to get the tax system working again?

Elsewhere in the house, Rivero Agüero's 15-year-old daughter Rosa was studying herself in a full-length mirror. She was happy and nervous. Tonight would be her first formal date. She was going out with Emilio, a 17-year-old who earlier that week had asked for her hand. How, she wondered, would she look in her new strapless dress with its plunging neckline? Was red too bright a color?

As she debated, she sat down at her desk and opened the blue-leather diary Emilio had given her. "I am going out at 8 p.m.," she wrote, "and will have no time to write later. I have many plans this last night of the year, but the atmosphere is so tense in my house that I don't know if my mother will let us leave. If she does, we will be very happy."

A few miles away, in the suburb of Vedado, 28-year-old revolutionary Max Lesnik sat in the oceanfront apartment of Jack Stewart. Publicly, Stewart was an official in the U.S. embassy's political section. Privately, he was a CIA agent.

Stewart sipped Old Kentucky Bourbon. Lesnik, sticking to the rigid rules of the underground, drank Canada Dry ginger ale. Lesnik was a leader of the Second National front of the Escambray, a guerrilla group more moderate than Castro's 26th-of-July movement.

As the sun set, the two men talked about a B-26 which that night was flying from Miami to the Escambray Mountains. It was loaded with weapons.

"We are clearing this plane out of Miami," said Stewart, "so that you and the 26th-of-July can have the same chances of influencing Cuba after Batista is gone."

High in the sky, over the Florida Straits, the B-26 was in trouble. It was a beatup, sur-



Fulgencio Batista:
A popular social reformer when he first seized power in the '30s, known for his charm and quick-thinking, he became unpopular after re-gaining power in 1952

plus plane, and the rear door had fallen into the Florida Everglades during take-off.

Dr. Armando Fleites was sitting in the cockpit, crammed between the American pilot and co-pilot. For two months, ever since he had sneaked out of the Escambray Mountains and gone to Florida, he had been working to bring these 20 crates of weapons and ammunition to 500 eager, but unarmed, guerrillas. Now, he thought of the irony: here he was, a medical man dedicated to saving lives, carrying a plane loaded with death.

The pilots had another thought: they were about to run out of gas.

The minutes passed slowly. Darkness was descending. Then they spotted their destination: the 700-foot dirt airstrip of the mountain city of Trinidad, which had been in rebel hands for a week.

As the B-26 flew over the town, the edgy guerrillas mistook it for an air force plane on a strafing run. They started shooting.

The pilot had no alternative. "Hold on," he said. He brought the plane straight in for a landing.

The B-26 hit the strip, bounced, came down, bounced again, the boxes of ammunition flying wildly in the cargo hold.

The plane crashed into a ditch, nose down. The crew climbed out. The rebels recognized them, and shouted greetings.

In the Havana suburb of Miramar, Rolando Masferrer sat in a rocking chair under a poinciana tree in his backyard. He was drinking rum and playing *Oh, Susannah* and *Red River Valley* on his harmonica. Close by, two

pigs boasted in a Western-style barbecue pit.

Masferrer, age 40, was a senator, the publisher of two daily newspapers and the commander of a private army, Los Tigres (the Tiggers). His men were tough. While the regular army often avoided battle, his men relished conflict.

Recently, he had moved 120 Tigres from Oriente province to a farm he owned 50 miles from Havana. The rebels were getting closer, and he expected that soon he "would have to fight it out on the streets of Havana."

That morning, at the offices of his newspaper *El Tiempo*, he had listened on his Halli-crafter short-wave radio to the army reports of the battle in Las Villas province, 165 miles to the east. The reports were not good, but still, the fighting was far away. It would be a quiet New Year's Eve. . .

In his residence, U.S. Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith, multimillionaire, Republican, social scion, was putting on his tuxedo. He did not want to go out that evening, but he had to, for the sake of appearances. He knew that there were rebel spies in his household staff; he did not know that his gardener had been making bombs in his basement.

That morning, he had sent his secretary, Edith Elverson, to the home of Dr. Gonzalo Guell, the prime minister. Miss Elverson was looking for a place to rent, and Guell, assuming that he would be leaving soon, wanted to rent to an American. That way, there would be less chance that an angry mob would destroy the place. When Miss Elverson had arrived, Mrs. Guell was packing her bags.

That afternoon, after a conversation with one of Batista's closest aides, Smith had sent a coded cable to Roy R. Rubottom, assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs. The cable stated that Batista would be leaving the country within 24 hours.

At 7:30 p.m., Brig. Gen. Silito Tabernilla arrived at Batista's Kuguine hacienda.

Silito knew the library wing well. Around the outside walls were large mahogany bookcases. In the center of the room, on a large

table, were busts of Lincoln, Martí, Washington and Bolivar.

Prime Minister Guell was pacing nervously at the far side of the room, outside of Batista's inner office.

After a short wait, the office door opened, and presidential secretary Morales emerged. Silito walked in.

"Do you have the list?" asked Batista.

Silito pulled it out of his pocket.

"Tonight we go," Batista said. "About 1 o'clock."

Silito summoned an aide and told him who to call. Those not invited earlier were to be asked to come to Camp Columbia for a small gathering at midnight. That was all.

The passenger list was detailed. In the president's personal plane, *Guaimaro*, would be Batista, his wife Marta, three more members of his family, president-elect Rivero Agüero and most of the political leaders. Batista even specified "5 *ayudantes*" (aides) and "6 *escortas*" (military bodyguards).

The second plane would carry Batista children (Ruben, Elita, Mirta), the military leaders (the Tabernilla clan had 16 seats) and the police leaders (Havana police chief Pilar Garcia had another 16 seats). The third plane had the smallest list, only 12 people, including a young Batista daughter, Marta Maria, and the first lady's secretary.

Silito called his brother, Winse. Were the planes ready?

Yes, said Winse, but not the pilots. He had given them the night off, to spend New Year's Eve with their families. He would have to locate them, and order them back to Camp Columbia.

Batista, in his inner office, went back to work. He was putting the final touches on the plans for transition. In the past month, he and Prime Minister Guell had suggested a number of possibilities to the Americans. He had offered to leave in early December and have Rivero's inauguration advanced. The U.S. said no. He had suggested a new election. The U.S. said no. He had proposed a coalition cabinet which would include his enemies. The U.S. said no.

After that, according to his closest aides,

The Background: Why Batista Left

By New Year's Eve 1958, the regime of Fulgencio Batista was crumbling, beset by forces within and without.

A well-liked leader in the 1930s and early '40s, Batista saw his popularity decline after regaining power in a military coup on March 10, 1952, shortly before elections were to be held.

Over the next six years, Batista ruled using varying forms of constitutional subterfuge, and increasing numbers of Cubans began viewing his government as corrupt and dictatorial. Opposition spread through many political parties and revolutionary movements, but one leader stood out: Fidel Castro.

Operating from a mountain hideout in the Sierra Maestra, Castro's romanticism charmed visiting journalists and, via Radio Rebelde, many of his fellow Cubans. He also influenced the U.S. State Department, which in March 1958 stopped shipment of 1,950 Garand rifles to the Cuban military. For Batista, that was a severe psychological

blow: he knew that no Cuban leader had long survived without American support.

The Cuban president scrambled to regain respectability. On Nov. 3, he held a much delayed election, in spite of Castro's threats against participants. Batista's hand-picked candidate, Andres Rivero Agüero, won easily, but it didn't really matter. Almost everyone considered the election a fraud. The last vestiges of American support disappeared.

On Dec. 9, the State Department sent William D. Pawley, a former ambassador and wealthy businessman, to see Batista. Pawley suggested Batista leave and a junta of his opponents be appointed.

On Dec. 17, U.S. Ambassador Earl E.T. Smith reluctantly transmitted an even tougher message. The United States would definitely not support the new Rivero Agüero government, scheduled to take office Feb. 24. Batista had to leave. The Cuban president asked if he could go into exile at his

Daytona Beach home. Smith suggested he try Spain instead.

After that, the military situation deteriorated rapidly. In Oriente, the rebels swept out of the hills and into the medium-sized cities. In Las Villas province, in the center of Cuba, several hundred bearded *barbudos* were threatening to cut the island in two.

The Cuban military, with the exception of the air force, simply was not fighting. In Oriente, officers were openly fraternizing with the rebels. In Las Villas, a train filled with arms and 350 soldiers surrendered to the *barbudos* without a fight.

Military leaders began searching for a junta to replace Batista. On Dec. 26, Gen. Francisco Tabernilla Dolz, chief of the armed forces, met with Ambassador Smith. On Dec. 28, Gen. Eulogio Cantillo, on Tabernilla's orders, flew by helicopter to a dilapidated sugar mill in Oriente for an exploratory meeting with Fidel Castro.

For Batista, the end was near.

Batista knew what would happen. He himself, perhaps better than any other Cuban, understood how publicity and charisma worked. He had used them himself to seize power. With his leaving, he knew that only one man could gather the necessary support to lead the country: Fidel Castro. Batista said he knew Castro was a Communist, but he believed the United States left no alternative.

Yet, for Batista to simply abandon the island would be too much. Instead, in his last hours on Cuban soil, he turned to a document he had often ignored, the 1940 Constitution. "The resignation and surrender of the government to a military junta was recommended. I preferred a constitutional form," he wrote in his 1962 book, *Cuba Betrayed*. "If the obstacle was Batista, if they desired a comparable government. . . under the Constitution of 1940 without suspension of guarantees or use of extraordinary measures, if the rebel chieftain claimed that his groups were not fighting the army but Batista, and if they were truly patriots fighting for freedom and democracy — a provisional government was the correct solution to the conflict."

Batista, according to one of his closest political advisors, did not believe a provisional government could hold out against the rebels. But if Castro said he believed in democracy and the 1940 Constitution, then Batista would taunt him with it, certain that his action would expose his bearded rival as a hypocrite.

On the streets of Havana, people were going out for New Year's Eve dinner. There were few large parties that night. The tension was too palpable for that. But in the nightclubs and in private homes, the rites of passage went on.

Cubans had their own New Year's Eve traditions — throwing a bucket of water out the front door or off the balcony was one — but they had also through the years adopted the crazy party hats, streamers and noisemakers of the Americans.

Certainly, the American influence in Havana was pervasive. On this New Year's Eve, even with tourism slowed by the fighting, perhaps 2,000-3,000 U.S. visitors had come down for a bacchanal. For most of them, their view of

Cuba was limited to the tourist areas, where there was something for every taste. There were ultramodern hotels and lavish nightclubs, like the Tropicana, a huge outdoor room where sequined showgirls descended on ornate trapezes from coconut trees. There were the casinos, where gamblers could hobnob with celebrities like actor George Raft, who greeted guests at the Capri. And of course, for the more daring, those who wished to escape the '50s puritanism of the United States, there was a sex market.

Few tourists bothered about the fact that much of the entertainment, especially the casinos, was controlled by a Meyer Lansky-linked group of American mobsters. If the tourists did know about it, they simply considered it an addition to the city's glamour.

That night, Rosa Rivero, chaperoned by a married couple, began her date with Emilio by having dinner at the Tropicana. Whenever Emilio smiled at her, Rosa's heart quickened. Surely, she thought, this must be love.

A few miles away, in the apartment of CIA agent Stewart, revolutionary Lesnik met his wife for the first time in a week. She brought *arroz con pollo* and a bottle of Portuguese sparkling rose wine.

At another party, U.S. Ambassador Earl Smith pulled Porfirio Rubirosa into a secluded corner. The ambassador from the Dominican Republic, Rubirosa was a close friend of Smith's, and one of the world's most publicized playboys (five marriages and an affair with Zsa Zsa Gabor). Rubirosa was adored by the Batista government and hated by the rebels, because of his country's sale of weapons to the army.

Rubirosa had been scheduled to go to Smith's home the next day for lunch, but now, at the party, Smith whispered that he and his wife, a French singer, should come early and have breakfast. A long breakfast. Smith said no more, but Rubirosa understood.

In Washington, a top-level meeting was starting at the State Department. The cable had been received from Ambassador Smith. The discussion was about what should be done.

The group knew each other well. They had been meeting almost daily for weeks to figure out the "Cuba situation." The chairman was Under-Secretary Christian Herter. Deputy

Under-Secretary Robert Murphy and Assistant Secretary Roy R. Rubottom were also there, along with the State Department's Cuban specialists. The only non-diplomats present were Allen Dulles, director of the CIA, and Admiral Arleigh Burke, chief of naval operations.

Herter remained a neutral listener while the others debated whether Castro should be allowed to assume power. Dulles, Murphy and Burke advocated that the rebel had to be kept out.

"He is a Communist," said Burke.

Others asked for proof. They mentioned *The New York Times'* stories of Herbert Matthews, who portrayed Castro as being democratic.

Burke had to admit he had no proof, but still he thought that Batista should be kept in Cuba until a middle-of-the-road government could be found.

The debate went on. . . . (This account is told by Admiral Burke, now retired. Murphy says that there were so many "Cuba situation" meetings at that time that he cannot recall any specific one. Rubottom says he does not remember the meeting. Admiral Burke denies the group contemplated an American invasion of Cuba.)

With their chaperones, Rosa and Emilio went to a small gathering at the home of Luisito Pozo, the son of Havana's mayor. Most of the people there were government officials and relatives.

While a trio played cha chas and boleros, the two teenagers slipped away to a small terrace for a talk. Emilio was annoyed that Rosa would soon be going back to school in Albany, N.Y. "Rosa, how can I stand to be so far away from you when I feel like I do about you, *mi corazon?*"

"I have to graduate." She was enthralled by his intensity. "My parents insist on it. We'll just have to wait a little, that's all."

"But you don't understand, Rosa. We have to get married. To see you like this, to dance with you, to sense you so close to me and then to know. . . ."

They danced, there on the terrace, close together, Emilio's hands holding her tightly, becoming a little daring when he realized that the adults inside were not paying attention to them, that the officials were huddling with one another, whispering, watching Mayor Justo Luis Pozo talk on the telephone with a forced smile. . . .

Through the streets of Havana, across the telephone lines, especially in the homes of the government officials and the upper class, the *boleros* were starting to roll.

At 10 p.m., in the Vedado area, Ana Maria Salazar received a call from one of her sons. He was at a party where there were relatives of government leaders, and he had just heard Batista was leaving. Mrs. Salazar made some phone calls. No, it couldn't possibly be true. Yes, it was. No. Yes. Maybe.

In a nearby Vedado apartment, *Time* magazine correspondent Jay Mallin received a call from an acquaintance in the Havana underground. "Something is happening at Camp Columbia," the man said, then hung up. Mallin returned to his guests. It was New Year's Eve, after all. *Bolas* had been rolling for weeks. "Maybe it's just a rumor," he decided. "To hell with it."

About 10 p.m., Gen. Eulogio Cantillo, chief



When Batista fled, Gen. Eulogio Cantillo (left) took control of the Havana infantry from Brig. Gen. Silito Tabernilla (right). Cantillo was commander in chief of the armed forces for 20 hours. Both men now live in Florida

of the army in Oriente province, arrived at the Kuquine hacienda. He had been summoned by a Batista aide.

As soon as he walked into the library, he sensed the tension. Prime Minister Guell and secretary Morales were pacing. Their faces were pale and tense. They tried to smile when they mumbled "hello," but failed. The door to Batista's inner office was closed. Cantillo waited.

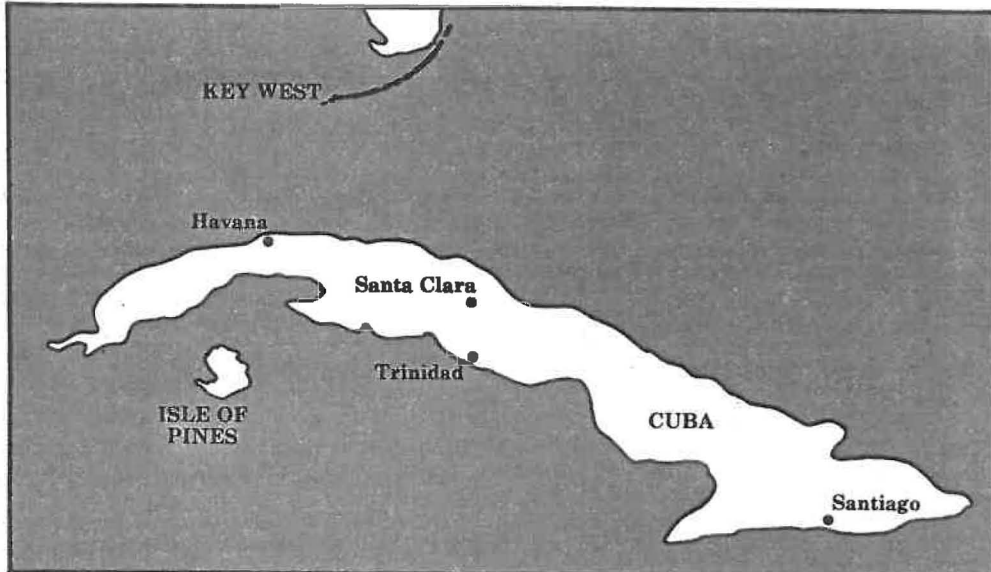
Like Batista, Cantillo was a poor country boy who had the talent and ambition to become something more. He was a professional soldier, enlisting in 1933 and working his way slowly up the ranks. He considered himself apolitical. He had not taken part in Batista's 1952 *golpe*, but a few days later he had been promoted to general.

In the last days of 1958, Cantillo, a man with an ulcer, went through a stomach-churning series of events as he hopped between Havana and Santiago. He returned to Havana early in the evening of Dec. 31, to spend a few hours with his wife of their 15th wedding anniversary. That party had been cut short by Batista's phone call.

When the door to the inner office in Kuquine opened, an aide waved Cantillo inside.

Batista, seated at his desk, was calm. "Well," he said, "I've been thinking." There was a pause. "Any day is as good as any other day. The longer I stay, the more people will be killed. So I've decided to go, and I want you to stay."

Cantillo was to head the military. The political leader would be determined by the Constitution. Since Vice President Guas Inclin could not be found, the office would be passed



Map: Pattie Stokes

to Senate President Anselmo Alliegro, who in turn would give the authority to the senior judge of the Supreme Court. Batista said he and secretary Morales had tried to figure out who that judge was, but they couldn't. Cantillo would have to learn that on his own.

Cantillo said nothing. He was thinking. Neither he nor an unknown judge had a power base of popular support.

"Mr. President," he said at last, "I can't do

On Dec. 31, 1958, rebel soldiers were about to seize the city of Santa Clara (population: 175,000) in the central province of Las Villas. Castro was in Oriente province, in the city of Palma Soriano, overlooking Santiago, Cuba's second largest city. Another rebel group had been in control of Trinidad for a week. Because of government-managed news, few of the 1.3 million people in Havana knew how serious the situation really was



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anything in Havana. I have no troops here. If I try to take command, they'll think it's a coup."

Batista agreed. He called in an aide and ordered him to phone Camp Columbia. Cantillo was to be made commander of the Havana infantry division, replacing Silito Tabernilla. That would give Cantillo his power base.

Then, again alone, the president and the general talked about details. Batista wanted Cantillo to take care of a few things for him. One was to call Ambassador Smith after the planes left. Cantillo was to tell Smith that Batista children were flying to the States, and ask Smith's cooperation in seeing they were allowed to enter the country.

As the two men left the inner office, aide Cosme Varas studied their faces for an indication of what was happening. The two were chatting good-naturedly. The meeting must have gone well, Varas decided. It was shortly after 11 p.m.

Throughout Havana, in homes, in nightclubs, lubricated by rum, by fruit punches, by brandy highballs, the parties were heating up.

At one small gathering, Daniel Braddock, the No. 2 man in the U.S. embassy, was approached by an upper-class Cuban woman. Her face showed terror.

"Help us, help us," she pleaded. Braddock didn't know what his wife was talking about.

About that same time, U.S. press attache Paul Bethel was driving from one party to another. Passing the home of Gen. Francisco Tabernilla, chief of the armed forces, Bethel saw a cluster of olive-green SIM Oldsmobiles in the driveway. Children, bundled in blankets, were being placed in the backseats.

In his Vedado apartment, Time magazine's Jay Mallin received another phone call. "What is happening at Camp Columbia?" the man asked. Now, Mallin decided, the rumors had to be checked. With some other guests, he jumped into his Volkswagen and drove toward the camp.

At 11:25 p.m., President-elect Rivero Aguero and his wife Isabel arrived at Batista's house at Camp Columbia. It stood on a street lined with smaller houses, the residences of military and police leaders, facing a large parade field.

The Rivero-Agueros walked up the stairs to the large living-dining area of the family's private quarters. About two dozen persons were already there. Gaston Godoy, the vice president-elect. Anselmo Alliego, president of the senate. Justo Luis Pozo, mayor of Havana. Sen. Santiago Rey. Plus many other political leaders, along with officers of the armed forces. Most had brought their wives.

The conversation was subdued. A few sipped champagne. Most drank coffee.

At 11:50 p.m., Batista and his top aides arrived. They went immediately to the living room. Prime Minister Guell and secretary Morales, two of the few who knew what was happening, clutched large brown envelopes. The envelopes con-

tained passports.

At midnight, Fulgencio Batista raised a cup of coffee laced with brandy, and said, "Felicidadez."

"Happy New Year," replied his guests.

A few houses away, General Cantillo returned home just before midnight. As the clock struck 12, he and his wife Yolanda toasted with a cup of cider and ate, one by one, the 12 grapes.

Then he took her into the bedroom and told her that he did not know if he was going to survive the next 24 hours. She cried.

At midnight in Cuba, there were no mass celebrations, no equivalents of America's Time Square craziness, but in houses throughout the island, people celebrated with a shout, a kiss, a toast.

In Miramar, Rosa and Emilio ate the 12 grapes, distributed on fine chinaware. Cider was passed around. The first toast was for Cuba, the second for peace, the third for Rosa's father, who was about to assume the presidency. The last toast was for Batista. Then Emilio kissed her.

In his Havana safehouse near the Cristina Street marketplace, Max Lesnik tuned a portable short-wave radio to pick up news of the fighting in Santa Clara. The army reports were in code, but the officers sounded desperate. They were shouting at each other.

In his backyard, publisher Masferrer talked to 20 of his bodyguards and police. He pointed to a corner, where boxes of cigars were stacked with cases of rum and Scotch. "You better drink the liquor and smoke the cigars," he said, "before Che Guevara comes down from the hills and takes them for himself." His men laughed, but Masferrer was only half-joking.

On the other side of the island, in Oriente, revolutionary Raul Chibas had a final cup of coffee, said goodnight to Major Quevedo and walked to the house where he was staying. There had been no celebration that night among the members of the 26th-of-July movement.

Outside Camp Columbia, Jay Mallin drove his Volkswagen slowly by the gates. The view was eerie. Heavy spotlights shone from the tops of the yellow concrete walls. At the gates, white-helmeted guards held sub-machine guns. Mallin knew that in the blockhouses, out of sight, were heavy machine guns. He was getting nervous. Then his car broke down.

Inside the camp, General Cantillo made a phone call, a call he dared not make with anyone else present. He was going to find out the name of the new president of Cuba.

Cantillo called a friend, an attorney familiar with the Supreme Court. Did he know who was the senior member of the court? Could he find out? Good. Find the man and bring him to Camp Columbia.

The attorney acted like a good soldier. He asked no questions.

Cantillo was running out of time. He hurried across the parade ground to the headquarters of the Havana infantry division. Gen. Silito Tabernilla was already

It is important, too, that age in itself carries its own philosophy. Within our social class, we are most at ease with those who are not more than 10 years older or younger than ourselves. For actually as we grow older, we are joining a new sub-culture. A sub-culture of those between 60 and 70 is quite different from one between 50 and 60 or between 40 and 50.

Another aid in contemplating advancing age is to rid ourselves of psychological hangups that tend to give us guilt feelings. The worst offender I have encountered in this category is the work ethic. In Western culture many of us feel guilty if our activities (much less our lack of activities) are not socially useful and personally satisfying. To be active just for the sake of being active does not satisfy the majority of us.

The fact is, however, that many of us who are middle-aged and middle class never learned how to play. Serious purposes — family, job, security, country, causes, etc. — took so much time that play became a childhood memory. We have forgotten how important it can be to our well-being to develop the skills to use time pleasantly, without worrying about economic rewards or social purposes. The use of time for "frivolous pleasure" has been unjustly put down in our class and culture. Ways to enjoy play — without guilt — are important building blocks for future contentment.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with meaningful work — at any age. Most of us have been forced to choose a fairly narrow path when we selected a vocation. Yet it is probable that many of us could have performed successfully the tasks involved in dozens of other occupations had we been forced into them or even drifted into them. Some of these occupations, we should realize, would probably have been as satisfying as the routes we did take. The major focus here is understanding that we all have multi-potentialities until very late in life.

At 40, it can be helpful to foresee the end of one career and the start of another. This applies not only to the housewife who goes back to school to become a social worker after her children are grown. It applies as well, in my own consulting experience, to a businessman who turned entirely to philanthropy, to a teacher who opened a boutique, a grandmother who became a hospital administrator, and even a physician who became a prospector.

One can go on and on in this vein. It is only important to know that you can do many things, and

that your choices are likely to be enlarged rather than restricted by the coming decades.

The art of being happier through activities lies in understanding our true needs as we add years. Most of us do not need great wealth or fame. We can be content with the approval of our loved ones and our peers. Why burden our advancing years with pursuits that are beyond our comforts and interests? This is a hangup most of us acquire in our formative years, and it is hard to lose. But tackling this problem at age 40 instead of age 65 gives us the perspective to work it out without suffering undue emotional stress.

Few of us will ever achieve a niche in history whatever we do. We must begin to realize that our nagging desire for immortality in the sense of earthly fame is wishful thinking. The only way most of us will achieve immortality is through our children. In the great sweep of time, our main role will have been as links in our family between one generation and the next. Understanding and appreciation, these grant you a sort of emotional pension.

This unique status of family link can also be the basis of an absorbing ego trip. We must play the detective a bit. Were there family histories written? Are old letters, diaries, Bibles moldering away in some dusty corner? What about tracing family history through the county courthouse, veterans records, old newspapers?

Seeking family memorabilia of all types can be a pleasing pastime. It can also offer some insight into your own characteristics in advanced age. You may learn of ancestors who lived to a ripe old age, and what traits you have in common with them. It could be very interesting to learn more about an ancestor who lived to a ripe old age in full possession of his faculties. Don't wait until your 99th birthday to echo the classic line — "If I knew I was going to live this long, I'd have taken better care of myself."

At 40, you still have 25 to 35 productive years ahead. This is a long way indeed, especially when you deduct the first 20 years of life as your formative period. There's more ahead than behind. In many ways, there is more to be planned for at 40 than there is at 20. It is time to begin a review of our past, of our activities and associates, with a view to where time inevitably leads. No one can win a war against old age. But you can win every battle except the last, and you can meantime enjoy your victories. That's a good way to live. T

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there, in an office crammed with 30 or 40 officers. Others stood outside. Tabernilla and Cantillo made short speeches. At 12:35 a.m., each initiated a document transferring command to Cantillo.

No one cheered, but the officers were obviously happy. Batista was leaving, and that meant an end to the civil war. "They thought it was just like any other coup d'etat in Latin America," recalls Tabernilla. "That the majors would become colonels, and the colonels would become generals."

A group of officers volunteered to go to the airfield to say goodbye to Batista. Cantillo ordered a platoon of soldiers and light-armor vehicles to protect the planes.

As Cantillo began sipping coffee and chatting with his new subordinates, Silito Tabernilla jumped in a jeep and drove across the parade ground to the presidential house. The guests were in the second-floor living room. Military aides were serving *arroz con pollo* from a buffet table. Tabernilla remembers that Batista ate a lot, but President-elect Rivero Aguero recalls seeing the president's face turn sour as he choked and spit out a forkful of food.

When the group had finished eating, Rivero Aguero saw Batista disappear into a hallway. Military leaders followed. So did Prime Minister Guell and secretary Morales. Evidently, they all were going downstairs to an office.

The political men and their wives stayed in the living room. What was happening? No one seemed to know. Mayor Pozo and Sen. Santiago Rey became nervous, said goodnight and left with their wives.

As they were walking out, a military aide rushed back to the living room. Anselmo Alliegro was wanted downstairs for a meeting.

Alliegro turned to Rivero Aguero. "You're the president-elect. You should be in the meeting."

No, said Rivero Aguero. Since he wasn't wanted, he wouldn't go.

Alliegro followed the aide down the stairs. The office was crowded. Most of the people were military. On the walls were photos of Batista's career — the '33 coup, the '40 election, the '52 coup, the '56 election. When General Cantillo entered the room, the door closed.

Secretary Morales handed a piece of paper to Batista. It was a speech Morales had written earlier that day. Batista read the words slowly:

"I want to avoid further bloodshed. I am leaving the presidency on an interim basis to Anselmo Alliegro, the president of the senate, because Vice President Rafael Guas Inclin cannot be found. It will be the duty of Alliegro to turn over this office later in the day to the oldest judge of the Supreme Court. At this stage in Cuban history, I feel it is best that I resign and leave in charge another Cuban, who would have better luck than I have." Those were the words the way Morales remembers them.

The room was silent. None of the military men demanded that the fighting continue.

Batista passed the document around the room. He asked people to sign it. Most scribbled their signature. They were not certain whether they were simply witnessing his resignation, or resigning themselves. It didn't matter.

Morales says that when he signed, he passed the speech to Anselmo Alliegro, who whispered to him, "Well, I've finally made it." Silito Tabernilla, however, recalls that Alliegro immediately rejected the idea of accepting constitutional authority. Cantillo says that Alliegro asked Batista for permission to remain behind.

For most people in the room, it was a minor point. The real control, they knew, was being passed to the military, and Batista proved it when he handed the document to General Cantillo.

"Good luck, Mr. President," Cantillo said. He left



Rosa Rivero, daughter of President-elect Andres Rivero Aguero: As she looked in 1958 at the age of 15, and as she looks today. For many Cubans like her, Dec. 31 began as a fun-filled New Year's Eve

the room as Silito Tabernilla began reading the list of who was departing on which plane.

Outside the camp's gates, journalist Mallin had pushed his car into a gas station and gotten it started. He was relieved. He had learned nothing about what was going on inside, but he decided he had had enough excitement for one night.

Three police cars were winding through the suburbs of Havana. In the lead car was Col. Orlando Piedra, chief of the Bureau of Investigation. In the second car was Lt. Col. Esteban Ventura, chief of the Anti-Communist and Anti-Subversive Repression Unit. American journalists often called Ventura "the most feared man in Cuba," but Batista supporters considered him an invaluable necessity. In the third car were Ventura's top aides.

Piedra and Ventura had worked closely together, but this night Piedra had been unusually secretive. He had asked Ventura to bring only his most trusted men. "This is highly delicate. We've found a whole bunch of top revolutionaries in a Miramar house. There may be dynamite involved."

The Ventura men followed Piedra, going west, on Calle Linea, under the Almendares River tunnel, then into Miramar along Fifth Avenue.

Colonel Piedra continued on, into the Marianao Beach area, where several amusement parks were located. But the parks had closed by that time. What was happening? Ventura's aides debated. They "smelled something."

Ventura signaled out the window. Piedra's car stopped. The two police leaders conferred in the shadows of shrubbery.

"The president," explained Piedra, "wants to have a frank exchange with you, but it has to be very private. We are going to Camp Columbia."

In Washington, the State Department meeting was dragging on. It had lasted much longer than anyone had expected, especially for a New Year's Eve. CIA chief Allen Dulles stood up to leave. He announced he would be able to accept Castro. Minutes later, Deputy Under-Secretary Murphy did the same. Finally, Admiral Burke said he couldn't stand alone. He would go along with the others. It was about 2 a.m.

An old man, dressed in a dark business suit, was arriving at the infantry office in Camp Columbia. General Cantillo didn't have time to talk to him. He ordered an aide to put the man in a room, to tell no one he was there, allow no one to speak to him.

The man was Carlos Manuel Piedra, the senior magistrate of the Supreme Court. No one had yet told him that he was scheduled to become the president of Cuba.

Upstairs, in Batista's Columbia home, the few politicians who remained still did not know what was happening. Many officials had left with their wives after Batista disappeared and his wife Marta went into her

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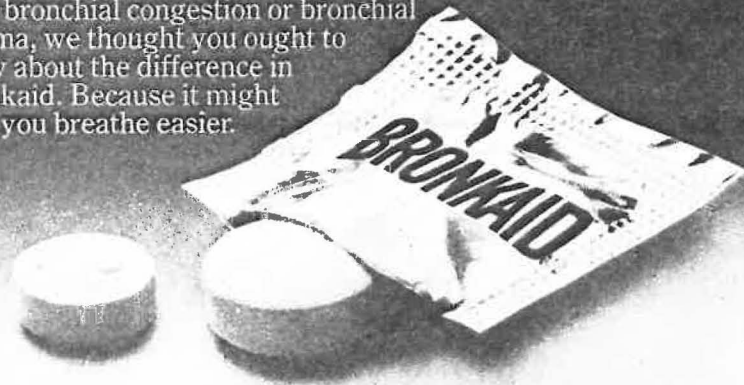
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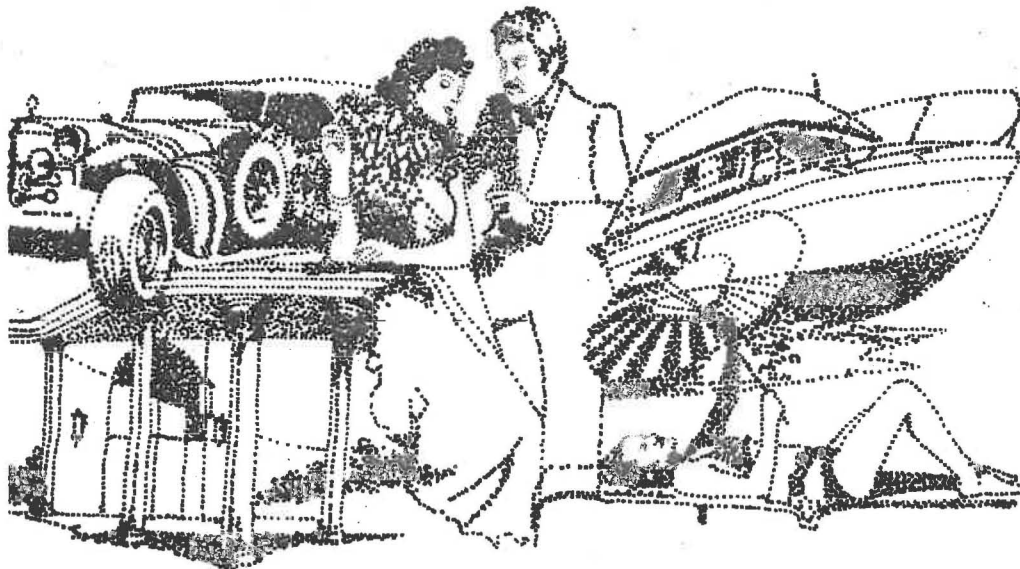
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NIGHT
Continued

bedroom. They had assumed the party was over.

Rivero Aguero had stayed behind. As president-elect, he thought he had a duty. But since nothing appeared to be happening, he decided to leave. "Let's go," he told his wife. "It's after 2."

Isabel said no, she hadn't said good-night to Marta. Where had Marta gone? Ah, there she was, coming out of her bedroom.

"Good night, Happy New Year," Marta said, smiling at them.

The Rivero-Agueros said goodbye and went down the stairs. They were almost at the door when Senator Alliegro rushed toward them. "Batista has resigned. He wants you to go with him."

Rivero Aguero ran to the office. A dozen generals were talking. Batista stood in the back of the room. Rivero Aguero snaked through the group. The president told him what was happening. "Your government will not be able to take over. Castro will arrive in Havana, and your lives will be in great danger. I do not want the responsibility of having you face a firing squad."

Rivero Aguero, who had thought he was going to be president in 54 days, "felt crumbling, like a great weight was falling on me."

He did not know what to say, but his wife did: "You have to go."

Then, erupting with rage, she turned to Batista. "So now you are leaving."

"Isabel," said Batista slowly. "There are 300 dead in Santa Clara. We have to stop this river of blood."

Isabel was unmoved. "I don't think this is a moment to think about those who have died. What about those who are going to die because of what you are doing?"

Batista patted her on the shoulder. "There is a plane leaving later this morning. You and your children will be able to fly to Florida."

As they talked, men were leaving the office. Secretary Morales walked to his chauffeur and bodyguards. He gave each a \$100 bill and asked them to take care of his family.

Silito Tabernilla was about to leave when Batista called him. He wanted to take the photographs, the ones showing his career, with him into exile. Silito nodded and delegated the task to an aide. The aide promised to wrap and send the photos on a plane the next day. Then Silito raced to his home, a block away, to pick up his wife and two children.

The exodus was beginning. It was less than a mile from Batista's house to the airfield. Some drove jeeps. Others rode in limousines. Some walked. They all hurried.

Rivero Aguero was one of the first to arrive at the three DC-4s, near the air force headquarters. He told his wife to get the children and return to the airfield as soon as possible.

As Rivero Aguero walked toward the planes, he realized he had \$215 in his pocket. So what could he do with it? He

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ANSWER TO TODAY'S PUZZLE

ALAN ALDA, ON THE ROLE OF MEN:
"Often we men work at jobs we don't like. What would be wrong with reversing roles for a while, letting the man take care of the house and go to school to study a field of interest while the wife worked?" WORD LIST: A—Answer. B—Lets. C—Aardwolf. D—Nibbles. E—Answer. F—Life. G—Downtown. H—Accordion. I—Outlaw. J—Net worth. K—Took hold of. L—Hot tent. M—Edgewise. N—Rites. O—Outweigh. P—Luther. Q—Enjoyed. R—Overwhelm. S—Fokker. T—Meet. U—Effgies. V—Nighthawk.

NIGHT
Continued

shrugged and kept walking. Others were arriving. Some had luggage, and Rivero Aguero thought bitterly that they had known more than he. What should he do? He felt guilty and hesitant. Then, he heard a voice shout from an upstairs window in the headquarters: "Viva Fidel! You should have left sooner."

A few blocks away, Silito Tabernilla climbed into the back of his Oldsmobile with his wife and children, and ordered his chauffeur to drive them to the airfield. He was wearing his Browning 9mm automatic. A car of bodyguards followed.

At the airfield, as Silito's family boarded the plane, he embraced his bodyguards, one by one. "You are in good hands," he told them.

Lt. Col. Ventura, head of the repression unit, arrived. General Cantillo told him what was happening. "You have to accompany him out of the country because he cannot guarantee your life if you stay."

"That is cowardice and betrayal," replied Ventura. He added other observations, then said he refused to leave without his family.

General Jose Eleuterio Pedraza, standing nearby, told Ventura that would not be possible, but that if Ventura went, Pedraza would personally guarantee that Ventura's family would be on a flight later that morning.

Ventura agreed and asked to call his family.

The two generals said no. No one could know until the planes had taken off.

Ventura exploded. He felt like pulling his .45-caliber pistol, but he didn't. Nevertheless, he made it absolutely clear that he was going to make that phone call. The generals finally agreed . . .

Batista and his wife Marta were among the last to arrive. He had stayed in his home talking, first to the politicians, then to his children, then to his servants. He came to the airfield in a limousine packed with at least seven people.

For a moment, Batista chatted with some army officers who had come to see him leave. Varas heard him say that there were plenty of seats for everyone, if they wanted to come along.

Batista walked to the foot of the DC-4's steps. To an officer, he said: "Remember to call Ricardo Nunez, Dr. Cervo Rubio, Raul de Cardenas. Make sure the oldest judge in the court is sworn in as soon as possible. And call the American ambassador. He's waiting for my call."

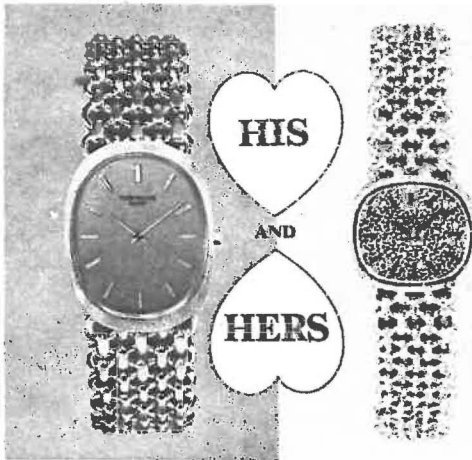
Rivero Aguero, dazed, was standing beside Batista. Batista grabbed his left arm and said, "Let's go." They climbed the stairs together. Rivero Aguero was thinking that "it was not a good way to end something. I felt ashamed."

Batista walked to the front of the cabin, and sat down next to Marta. His wife was attempting to smile, to show people everything was all right.

To the passengers, minutes seemed to tick by. Nothing was happening. Was there a delay? No one wanted to ask.

Next week: The conclusion of Cuba's Longest Night.

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ANSWER TO TODAY'S PUZZLE



STEINBECK: OBSERVATION "It used to be that we worried about protecting the intellectuals and artists from the government. Now it looks like we have to protect the government from the intellectuals and the artists." WORD LIST: A—Scranton. B—Tooted. C—Elm-leaf. D—Intricata. E—Nightgown. F—Buttercup. G—Edelweiss. H—Outthroat. I—Kittiwake. J—Ottoman. K—Sattia. L—Shovel. M—Estival. N—Reformed. O—Vehement. P—Although. Q—Trotted. R—Intruse. S—Ownership. T—Nettle.

New Year's Day, 1959

The Longest Night

Cuban officials flee so fast that some leave their car engines running. Castro rushes to a radio station. A man still wearing prison uniform takes charge of the armed forces. Here, Tropic presents Part II of the saga which changed Cuba — and Miami

By Roberto Fabricio
And John Dorschner

Time: 3:30 a.m., Jan. 1, 1959. Though few Cubans yet know it, Fulgencio Batista, pressured by the U.S. government and the Cuban rebels, has resigned. Now, at the military airfield at Camp Columbia, the leaders of his government sit in two DC-4s. Batista is aboard, but minutes seem to tick by with nothing happening. Why the delay? No one wants to ask...

Near the front of the passenger cabin, president-elect Andres Rivero Aguero stared blankly out a window. Batista's personal physician was sitting across the aisle. "What do you think of this?" asked the doctor.

"It is the end of the world, don't you see?" replied Rivero Aguero, not thinking what he was saying. He turned and saw Batista chuckle. Batista's wife Marta was smiling. But when they saw him watching, their expressions became serious again.

Moments later, Lt. Col. Esteban Ventura boarded the plane. The volatile chief of the Anti-Subversive Repression Unit, Ventura stormed to the front and confronted Batista. If Ventura had to leave, he was going with Batista, or he wasn't going at all. And if Ventura didn't leave, then nobody...

All right, it was agreed. Ventura could fly with them. The police enforcer sat down.

Aide Cosme Varas closed the door. The engines of the plane revved, and it moved down the runway. Right behind it was a second DC-4, carrying the leaders of the military and the police.

At 3:40 a.m., Jan. 1, 1959, the two planes left the ground of Cuba almost simultaneously.

Gen. Eulogio Cantillo watched the planes soar into the sky. The new chief of the armed forces, the man theoretically in control of the country, was standing with Gen. Jose Pedraza under a large bo tree. It was a good spot. Cantillo wanted to watch the planes leave, but he had wanted to remain inconspicuous.

"Well," said General Pedraza, an old man who had seen more than one coup. "They left a burning spike in your hand. I wish you luck..."

In her bedroom, Rosa Rivero was unzipping the back of her dress. The 15-year-old daughter of the president-elect, she was thinking about her date in the morning, when Emilio would take her to a barbecue party beside a swimming pool. Should she take her white swimming suit, the one with the low back?

Downstairs, the door opened. Her mother ran up the stairs, crying, calling out the children's names. When she saw Rosa, she became hysterical.

"Is my father dead?"

Her mother, nodded. Rosa screamed. The two women embraced and cried on each other's shoulders.

Rosa's grandmother rushed in with glasses of water. Mrs. Rivero drank. It calmed her down enough to tell what had happened. "Get a few things together. We have to go too. We don't know when we can come back."

Rosa ran to a phone and called Emilio. He cried. "When will I see you?... Please call me as soon as possible... How can this be?"

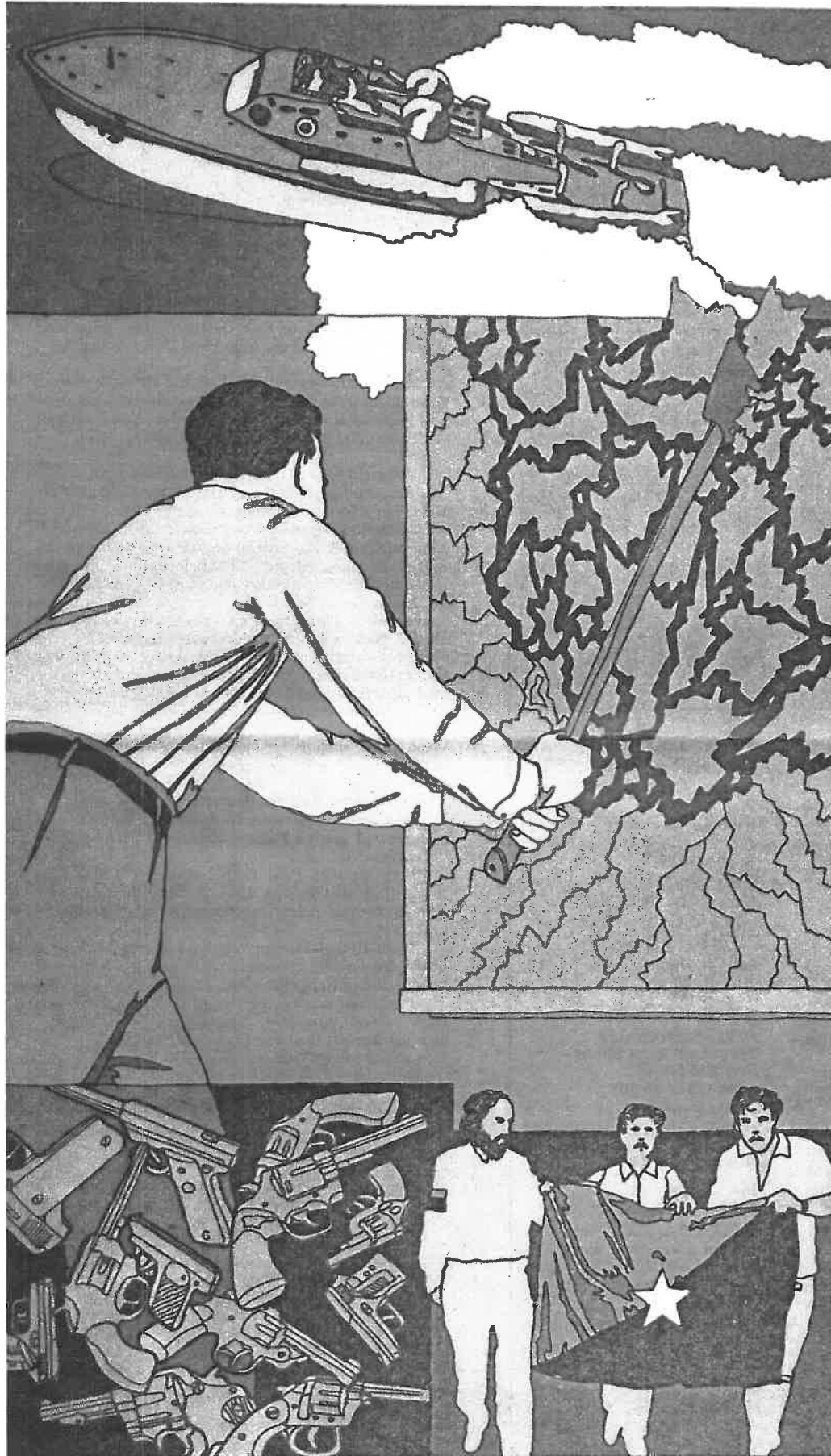
They talked for a few seconds more. Then Rosa went to her room. Into a small suitcase, she threw blue leather shoes, toothpaste and toothbrush, lingerie and her new diary.

Shortly after 4 a.m., the phone rang in the home of publisher Rolando Masferrer: His wife awoke and answered the phone. Masferrer heard her mumble something about Batista leaving. He grabbed the receiver.

It was one of his wife's women friends, a person whom he knew was in the 26th-of-July. The woman screamed an obscenity, then said: "Batista has left you and your Tigers holding the bag." She laughed and hung up.

At Palm Avenue in Miami's Coconut Grove, the phone rang. Justo Carrillo — a Cuban intellectual involved in politics and conspiracies all his adult life — told his wife, "Answer the phone. Batista must have fled."

That was exactly the message. Carrillo had been waiting a long time to hear the news. He was a leader in the Montecristi Movement. In 1956, he had been the only



civilian involved in the plot of 100 officers — *Los Puros* — to overthrow Batista, and for months he had been promoting a scheme in which two C-47s would swoop down on the Isle of Pines and free Colonel Ramon Barquin and the other imprisoned *Puros*. In December, Carrillo had been approached by a CIA intermediary who wanted to free Colonel Barquin by bribing the warden with more than \$100,000. Carrillo found an agent to make the journey, but by the time he arrived on the Isle of Pines, in late December, the warden had been transferred. The scheme died.

Now, with Batista gone, Carrillo celebrated. He and his wife took out the Scotch and toasted the fall of the dictator. A new day, a new era was dawning for Cuba. . .

In the infantry headquarters, General Cantillo met the senior magistrate for the first time. He was a thin, elderly man with a bony, angular face, and he appeared confused and sleepy.

Cantillo showed him Batista's letter of resignation.

"Are you the senior magistrate?" Cantillo asked.

"Yes," Judge Carlos Manuel Piedra replied.

"Are you the one who succeeds in case the others are not available?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, you are the president of Cuba."

The judge read the document slowly. It had been a simple New Year's Eve for him, and now, in a nation peppered with intrigue and fighting, he was being told he was president.

"Well, Mr. President," the general asked. "What do we do now?"

"Well, General, what do we do now?"

They talked. At one point, Cantillo said: "Batista fled. We didn't put him out of office. The people did. And the people are represented by Fidel Castro, whether we like it or not." Cantillo wanted to call Castro and tell him to come to Havana and to form a new government.

Piedra said no. "I cannot talk to a man who is an outlaw."

Then they agreed to inform the military bases across the island that Batista had left. Those army units fighting against the rebels were to make contact and suggest a ceasefire.

"Mr. President," said Cantillo, "I am chief of the army by accident. You are chief of the government by accident. You don't know anything about government, and neither do I. But we must do the best we can. . . Do you think it would be wise to consult with people experienced in government?"

Yes, the judge thought it would be wise. Telephone calls went out. Before dawn, longtime politicians and former military leaders began arriving. One was General Loynaz del Castillo, who had been a hero in the War for Independence 60 years before.

Batista's plane was flying east, toward the Dominican Republic, going across the land mass of Cuba, flying at 10,000 feet.

On takeoff, the pilots, assuming Batista was going to his Daytona Beach home,

Illustration: Pete Smith

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NIGHT

Continued

had headed north, toward Florida. But then Batista told aide Cosme Varas that he wanted to go to Ciudad Trujillo. The statement had shocked the people in the plane.

Few passengers said anything. Morales called the silence "funereal." Rivero Aguero considered the DC-4 "a huge casket carrying a load of live corpses."

Cosme Varas made out the passenger list, which would be needed for the customs people in the Dominican Republic. Forty-four persons were aboard. About 20 seats were empty.

At dawn, the plane flew over the Sierra Maestra, the rugged mountains where for two years Castro had been waging his war of bullets and words. "I wonder," Rivero Aguero said to Sen. Gaston Godoy, "what kind of welcome we would get from Fidel if we crashed."

Aboard the second DC-4, flying through the rain toward Jacksonville, the smallest children were sleeping. A group of officers talked quietly. "Now," said Silito Tabernilla, "we have to start conspiring again."

A second wave of the exodus began at dawn.

Rosa and her family arrived at the Columbia airfield. For a long time, they sat in the plane. The door was shut, the engines revved, but the pilot refused to take off. A military official argued with the pilot. Finally, the pilot relented. The plane took off. Rosa rolled her coat into a pillow and went to sleep.

In Jaimanita Beach, near his Miramar home, Masferrer and 20 Tigers from his private army boarded an old PT boat he had purchased three days before. The boat was drawing water, but Masferrer worried that the air force might turn against them and strafe the boat after it was light. At 6:30 a.m., they left.

In the harbor, a group of navy officials boarded the Batista yacht, *Marta III*, and headed toward Key West. Other leaders sought asylum in sympathetic embassies.

Ambassador Earl Smith arrived at the U.S. embassy still wearing his tuxedo. He had called in the embassy staff and invited Porfirio Rubirosa to his home for "breakfast."

Press attache Paul Bethel climbed to the penthouse floor and looked down at Malecon Boulevard. Blue-and-white police cars patrolled the streets, as usual.

Then Bethel saw an old Ford driving down the broad boulevard, crammed with people waving the black-and-red flags of the 26th-of-July.

The squad cars rushed toward the Ford, converging from several directions. Then, abruptly, as if they had just learned the news from police radio, the patrolmen zoomed down side streets and disappeared.

Only the revolutionaries remained.

On the first day of 1959, the story spread across the island of Cuba. Many cheered. Some cried. Most simply waited.

The change in power was abrupt and chaotic. But compared to the slaughter of 1933, there was little bloodshed.

Within hours, 26th-of-July members were patrolling the streets. By mid-morning, Boy Scouts were directing traffic at many suburban intersections.

Mobs roamed through the streets, but they were selective in their targets. Shell gas stations were attacked, because the Shell president was believed to have helped Batista obtain arms from Britain. Parking meters, relatively new in Cuba, were wrecked, because people thought their coins were going to Batista. Masferrer's newspaper and the Dominican Republic embassy were both sacked. Gambling tables in some casinos were smashed.



Using any kind of vehicle they could find, the 26th-of-July soldiers arrived in Havana on Jan. 2 and took control of Camp Columbia. Castro himself did not come to the capital until Jan. 8

The houses of persons close to Batista were special targets. At labor leader Eusebio Mujal's house on Third Street, an angry crowd broke down the door and pushed out air conditioners. One man walked out with two bottles of champagne and a blue curtain.

The American embassy was not touched, and no demonstrators approached it. In fact, throughout the next few days, no anger was shown toward Americans. When a U.S. flag was attached to an American's house or car, the mobs left it alone.

Still, U.S. tourists were frightened by the scenes on the streets. They retreated to the Havana Hilton and the Hotel Nacional, where they huddled in the lobbies. One American woman remembers that, when a hotel window broke, the tourists dived for cover. "You never saw so much mink hit the deck so fast."

The only fighting in Havana, apparently, came from a small band of Masferrer's Tigers. Downtown, in the old office complex called Manzana de Gomez, three Tigers battled on until early afternoon, when they ran out of ammunition. All three died.

At Rancho Boyeros, Havana's international airport was in chaos. Capt. William Alexander, a pilot for Cubana Airways, arrived about 8 a.m. and saw men in tuxedos and women in long gowns running from the parking lot to the terminal building.

About that same time, six 26th-of-July men came to close down the runways. One of the underground men, a trumpet player, saw 20 cars blocking the airport driveway. In some, the engines were still running. The owners must have been in such a rush that they hadn't bothered to take their keys. The musician studied the cars. He chose a 1958 black Chrysler, drove it to a nearby parking lot and pocketed the keys. The revolution had an automobile.

The 9 a.m. and 11 a.m. Cubana flights to Miami were able to take off, and some chartered planes escaped. On one were Meyer Lansky, head of the Cuban gambling syndicate; Santo Trafficante, operator of the San Souci Hotel and Casino; Joseph Silesi; and Charles (The Blade) Tourine. The plane landed in Jacksonville. Florida lawmen immediately warned that Batista's fall would mean increased Mafia activity in the States.

Late in the morning, the 26th-of-July men managed to drive trailer trucks onto the runways, and the airport was forced to close down.

That blocked the escape of tourists, but most Batista leaders were already on foreign soil. Batista's

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NIGHT

Continued

plane landed in Ciudad Trujillo at 8:15 a.m. Batista had a cup of coffee at the airport before going to a hotel. Others went to the Cuban embassy, where they made passports for themselves.

In Jacksonville, passengers in the Tabernillas' plane had to wait two hours before customs would clear them. Rosa Rivero and other relatives of officials had a similar wait in Palm Beach.

In New Orleans, two Batista planes touched down. Customs men there confiscated 50 automatic revolvers, a rifle, sev-

eral hand grenades and one gold-plated pistol.

Most planes avoided Miami: it was the base of many anti-Batista exiles. Throughout the day of Jan. 1, Cubans drove up and down Flagler Street, honking their horns, shouting, waving 26th-of-July flags. When the Cubana flights arrived at the Miami airport, police had to keep angry demonstrators away from the passengers.

Inside the terminal, Justo Carrillo and several hundred anti-Batista politicians waited nervously for word that the Havana airport had re-opened. The men came from many different political factions, but all had one thought: whoever could get to Havana first had a good chance of forming a new government...

At Camp Columbia, General Cantillo's new advisors droned on. Each seemed to have a different idea of what should be done, a unique scheme on how to advance his own position in the new government. Cantillo listened, groggy from a sleepless night, his despair intensified by radio reports from the army bases. The rebels were ignoring pleas for a ceasefire; they wanted complete surrender, and in most places they received it.

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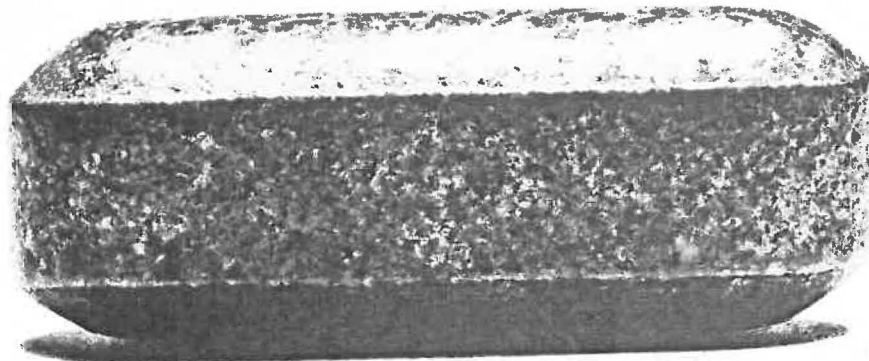
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In Oriente province, Raul Chibas caught up with Fidel Castro at a radio station at 10:30 a.m. Chibas leaned against a glass partition and looked into the tiny studio, where Castro was in the midst of an emotional speech. It was characteristic, Chibas thought, that Castro's first instinct had been not to lead troops to Havana, but to make a speech...

Swiftly, Castro was becoming the voice of Cuba. In Havana, Max Lesnik conferred by phone with Dr. Armando Fleites and other Second National Front guerrillas in the Escambray Mountains. They agreed: it was a victory for the 26th-of-July and Fidel Castro; there was nothing they could do.

In the afternoon, General Cantillo went to the Presidential Palace for the swearing in of Judge Piedra as president.

As the elderly magistrate made phone calls, Cantillo chatted with Ambassador Smith. Smith expressed concern about the safety of people in the embassies. That was all he talked about, says Cantillo. The ambassador gave no support to Cantillo's attempt to form a new government.

When Judge Piedra emerged from an office, he looked tired and haggard.

"General," said the judge, "I do not want to be president. I want to go home."

Cantillo argued, but the judge refused to change his mind. The general returned alone to Camp Columbia. His hope for a constitutional solution, his bid for power, had failed.

At Columbia, Cantillo made a decision: he would bring back Col. Ramon Barquin from the Isle of Pines. Barquin was a one-time professional soldier who had good contacts among the revolutionaries. Perhaps Barquin could form a government.

That evening, Barquin and other Los Puros officers arrived at Camp Columbia

on a C-47. They still wore their prison uniforms: rough navy-blue cloth with large white P's on the backs.

Barquin, after almost three years in prison, tried to figure out what was happening. Cantillo showed him around the camp. Soldiers were lying on the grass. Many of them wore 26th-of-July arm-bands. Barquin realized they weren't secret revolutionaries: "They wanted to get on the bandwagon. . . It was the only way of escape they had."

Ten British Centurion tanks sat on the parade field. They had arrived only a week before. The soldiers told Barquin that the tanks were "lions without teeth" — their armaments had not been installed.

About 11 p.m., Cantillo turned over command of the armed forces to Barquin, who was still wearing his prison uniform.

Cantillo says Barquin offered him a plane to escape into exile, but Cantillo said no, he would not abandon his men. He went home and fell into bed. It was the first sleep he had had in 39 hours.

Barquin tells a different version: he ordered Cantillo to go home and stay there, "because I do not know how responsible you are for what has happened here."

Ramon Barquin was not a 26th-of-July man. He was a military professional and a fierce opponent of Batista. If he leaned toward any of the underground groups, he says, it was toward the student-led Directorio.

Now, however, his choices were limited. He talked by radio to the army posts at Santiago, Santa Clara, Camaguey. All were in the hands of the 26th-of-July. About 11:30 p.m., he attempted to call Fidel Castro or Judge Manuel Urrutia, who had been designated president by the rebel forces. Barquin wanted to tell them to come to Havana and form a government, but he couldn't locate them.

About 2 a.m., Jan. 2, the rebels found him. Camilo Cienfuegos, a Castro lieutenant leading the *barbudos* in Las Villas, told Barquin that he had received orders, in triplicate, signed by Castro and Urrutia.

"I have orders to go to Havana and take command," Cienfuegos said.

"Well," replied Barquin, "if you have your orders, then come on."

That night, however, Fidel Castro was far from confident. In a camp near the mountain town of Escandel, he lay fully clothed on a small bed and talked about his fears to Raul Chibas: "I have sent Camilo to take over Columbia, but I don't know what is going to happen. . . Everything could be lost in the next few hours."

At 11 a.m., a group of men came to the house of General Cantillo. His wife woke him. The men said they were placing him in jail for his own protection. (Barquin says the arrest was ordered by a 26th-of-July chief in Havana; he did not know about it until that evening. Cantillo will say only that the arresting officers were army men.)

That afternoon, the *barbudos* began arriving at Camp Columbia. *Time* correspondent Jay Mallin watched them as they circled the camp's walls. Their hair was long, their beards full, their clothes

stained and sweaty. They rode in old pickup trucks, battered cars, army jeeps, anything they could confiscate in their rush to Havana.

Camilo Cienfuegos was there. Raul Chibas had flown in from Santiago. Castro himself had not come.

As the two revolutionary leaders drove into the camp with their men, past the machine-gun stations at the gate, past the soldiers and the 10 awesome tanks on the parade field, Chibas turned to Cienfuegos and said, "You know, we have only 300 badly armed men. If these guys wanted, they could kill us all at the drop of a hat." But the army soldiers were cheering. Cienfuegos and Chibas walked up the steps of Estado Mayor, the general staff headquarters. Ramon Barquin was there to greet them.

It was all over, and yet it had only begun. . .

Epilogue

In the first 20 days of January 1959, some 200 Batista officials were executed by the rebels. Since then, 5,000 more have been killed. About 750,000 Cubans, representing many political persuasions, have immigrated to the United States. Behind them they left a government which radically altered every institution and lifestyle on the island. Today, it is conservatively estimated that 15,000 political prisoners are in Cuban jails. Some say the figure is closer to 60,000.

Here is what happened to some of the people who played major roles in Cuba's Longest Night:

Gen. Eulogio Cantillo was imprisoned for eight years, three months and 18 days. He is now in Miami, the co-owner of a small paving company.

Silito Tabernilla, Batista's chief military aide, is office manager of a West Palm Beach construction company.

Dr. Raul Chibas stayed with the Castro government for a year. He is now a college professor in New York.

Ramon Barquin, asked to leave by Castro after four months, is executive director of the American Military Academy in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Andrés Rivero Aguero, the president-elect, is retired, living in a modest stucco home in Little Havana.

Esteban Ventura, the police "enforcer," is the owner of Protective Security Services and Ventura Collection Agency in Miami.

Fulgencio Batista died of a heart attack on Aug. 6, 1973, at a villa in southern Spain.

Earl E.T. Smith, the U.S. ambassador, is mayor of Palm Beach.

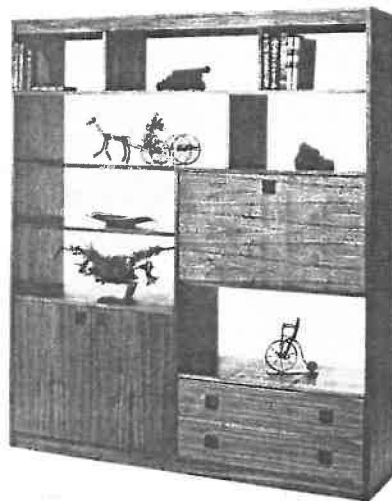
Max Lesnik, the Second Front revolutionary, is editor and publisher of *Replica* in Miami.

Dr. Armando Fleites, the man who flew with the arms-loaded B-26, is a doctor in a Miami clinic.

Rolando Masferrer was owner of the weekly *Libertad* in Miami until he was killed by a bomb on Oct. 31, 1975.

Rosa Rivero, the teenager who thought she had found true love, is a real-estate secretary in Miami. She has been married twice, divorced twice. Since that night, she has never heard from Emilio. T

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