



## **First medical student killed in defense of the nascent Socialist Revolution**

### **Primer estudiante de medicina caído en defensa de la naciente Revolución Socialista**

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On April 16, 1961 at 12:00 a.m., one day after the criminal bombing of the Cuban air bases, the mercenary invasion of Brigade 2506, made up of 1,500 men, began at Playa Girón and Playa Larga, in the Bay of Pigs. <sup>(1)</sup> This invasion was part of Operation Pluto, the most powerful project ever organized by the CIA. An army of exiles would be trained in Guatemala; the hand of the United States would be hidden. <sup>(2)</sup> Army General Raúl Castro Ruz commented on the purpose of the invasion and stated that: [...] It had to be liquidated in 72 hours, because it was foreseen, with great lucidity on the part of Fidel, that if we did not do so, once they consolidated their beachhead, they would have moved the puppet government there [...]. <sup>(3)</sup>

As soon as they arrived on Cuban soil, the invaders encountered the tenacious resistance of a small group of militiamen assigned to guard the area. After analyzing all the information received, Commander in Chief Fidel Castro deduced that Playa Girón was the main direction of the coup and began to give orders to mobilize all necessary resources there with the objective of immediately annihilating the invaders. He issued Communiqué No. 1, announcing that: “The glorious soldiers of the Rebel Army and the National Revolutionary Militias have already engaged in combat with the enemy at all landing points. We are fighting in defense of the sacred homeland and the Revolution against the attack of mercenaries organized by the imperialist government of the United States.” An appeal was also issued to the peoples of America and the world, announcing the aggression of the United States and the heroic combat of the Cuban people. He concludes by saying: “All of Cuba is standing up with the slogan “Homeland or

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Death.” Our battle is your battle. Cuba will win!”<sup>(4, 5)</sup> In less than 66 hours, on April 19, 1961, the revolutionary forces defeated the mercenary troops.<sup>(1)</sup>

Imperialism and the oligarchy were unable to achieve their goals of recovering and restoring neocolonialism in Cuba, of eliminating the first socialist experience on the continent and of crushing the example of the Cuban Revolution for the Latin American peoples. Yankee imperialism was inflicted with its first military defeat in Latin America.<sup>(1, 4, 5)</sup>

On the historical significance of the victory obtained by the Cuban people against the invasion, Fidel stated: [...] This date will always have great significance in the history of our Revolution. It was a decisive battle for our country and for our Revolution [...] If the battles of the struggle against tyranny made the conquest of revolutionary power possible and changed the course of history in our country, the battle of Playa Girón prevented the history of our country from turning back and saved the Revolution.”<sup>(6)</sup> The battle at Playa Girón was not only a battle in defense of independence and sovereignty, but it was a battle in defense of socialism.<sup>(1, 3, 5)</sup>

Pedro Antonio Borrás Astorga, a medical student from the 1959-1960 course, the first recruit after the revolutionary triumph, left on April 18, 1961 in Column 2 of the Rebel Army towards Playa Girón,<sup>(7)</sup> to fulfill his responsibility as a medic. The young man was born on July 13, 1940 in the neighborhood of La Palma, belonging to the municipality of Consolación del Norte, son of Dr. Pedro Borrás Falcón and the laboratory technician Ana Luisa Astorga Menéndez. At three years of age he began to live with his paternal grandparents, in Manzanillo, province of Granma; there he began his primary studies. From the second to the fifth grade he did them in the United States, returning to Manzanillo after finishing the sixth grade. He began his secondary education at the Pinar del Río institute, in 1953.<sup>(7, 8)</sup>

From this stage he demonstrated his firm revolutionary position and decided not to attend classes in an attitude of protest against the abuses of the tyranny; although he only attended the exams.

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He graduated from high school in 1959. After entering the medical career, he joined the university militias, received a course in war medicine and became part of the medical corps of the National Revolutionary Militias as a medic. His love for science and nature led him to join the group of speleological explorers. Pedro was an affable, affectionate and simple young man, with very good personal relationships. <sup>(7)</sup>

Pedro wrote to an old friend who had betrayed the Revolution the following: “I feel sorry for you who will not be able to participate in this glorious journey of a people; for you who one day will curse your stupid betrayal.” “...The more years pass, the more unhappy you will be, because as the years pass there will be more progress on this island.” <sup>(9)</sup>

He was one of the volunteers who offered to help capture mercenaries who on the 20th, deep in the bush, were still harassing the revolutionary forces. When he separated a little from the group, six mercenaries who were lying in ambush, killed him, in Playa Morena, very close to Girón, and when his companions returned they found him dead. Commander in Chief Fidel Castro Ruz, when handing him over to his parents, said: [...] because I do not have a title, without the vibrant seal of decorum, because I do not have a title without the clean signature of duty fulfilled [...]. <sup>(7)</sup>

Pedro Antonio Borrás Astorga thus became the first medical student to fall in defense of the Socialist Revolution and constitutes a revolutionary paradigm for all medical students in Cuba and especially for the students of the University of Medical Sciences of the Revolutionary Armed Forces.

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