

## CUBA

### The Vengeful Visionary

(See Cover)

The executioner's rifle cracked across Cuba last week, and around the world voices hopefully cheering for a new democracy fell still. The men who had just won a popular revolution for old ideals—for democracy, justice and honest government—themselves picked up the arrogant tools of dictatorship. As its public urged them on, the Cuban rebel army shot more than 200 men, summarily convicted in drumhead courts, as torturers and mass murderers for the fallen Batista dictatorship. The constitution, a humanitarian document forbidding capital punishment, was overridden.

The only man who could have silenced the firing squads was Fidel Castro Ruz, the 32-year-old lawyer, fighter and visionary who led the rebellion. And Castro was in no mood for mercy. "They are criminals," he said. "Everybody knows that. We give them a fair trial. Mothers come in and say, 'This man killed my son.'" To demonstrate, Castro offered to stage the courts-martial in Havana's Central Park—an unlikely spot for cool justice but perfect for a modern-day Madame Defarge.

In the trials rebels acted as prosecutor, defender and judge. Verdicts, quickly reached, were as quickly carried out. In Santiago the show was under the personal command of Fidel's brother Raúl, 28, a slit-eyed man who had already executed 30 "informers" during two years of guerrilla war. Raúl's firing squads worked in relays, and they worked hour after hour. Said Raúl: "There's always a priest on hand to hear the last confession."

In a Mass Grave. The biggest blood-letting took place one morning at Santiago's Campo de Tiro firing range, in sight of the San Juan Hill, where Teddy Roosevelt charged. A bulldozer ripped out a trench 40 ft. long, 10 ft. wide and 10 ft. deep. At nearby Boniato prison, six priests heard last confessions. Before dawn buses rolled out to the range and the condemned men dismounted, their hands tied, their faces drawn. Some pleaded that they had been rebel sympathizers all along; some wept; most stood silent. One broke for the woods, was caught and dragged back. Half got blindfolds.

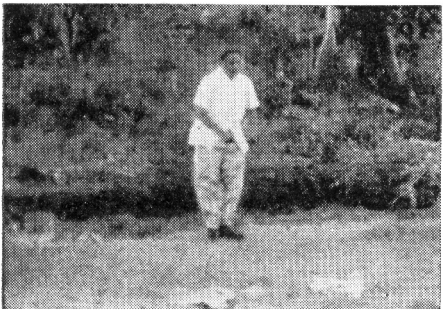
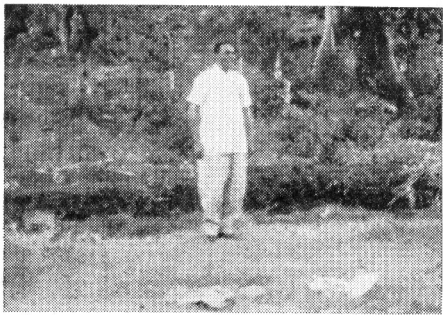
A priest led two of the prisoners through the glare of truck headlights to the edge of the trench and then stepped back. Six rebel executioners fired, and the bodies jackknifed into the grave. Two more prisoners stepped forward, then two more and two more—and the grave slowly filled. Lieut. Enrique Despaigne, charged with 53 murders, got a three-hour reprieve at the request of TV cameramen, who wanted the light of a full dawn.

When his turn came, Despaigne was allowed to write a note to his son, smoke a final cigarette and—to show his scorn

and nerve—to shout the order for his own execution. On a hill overlooking the range, a crowd gathered and cheered as each volley rang out. "Kill them, kill them," the spectators bellowed. As the death toll reached 52 and the pit was halfway full, one rebel muttered: "Get it over quickly. I have a pain in my soul."

By noon 70 prisoners had died. The Santiago rebels also sentenced ten men to ten-year jail terms and acquitted 47. In Camagüey 19 prisoners were shot, in Matanzas twelve, in Santa Clara 30, in Cienfuegos eight. Almost all were followed by a *coup de grâce*—two .45 slugs fired into the head of a man already dead. Havana jails held 800 accused men; the government estimated that, in all, 2,000 would stand trial.

**Misgivings.** The world looked on, tried to understand the provocation, boggled at the bloodshed. Uruguay's U.N. delegate, Argentina's Cuban ambassador, liberal U.S. Senator Wayne Morse, all protested. Puerto Rico's Governor Luis Muñoz Marín was "perturbed." Castro's answer: "We have given orders to shoot every last one of those murderers, and if we have to oppose world opinion to carry out justice, we are ready to do it." He added a few irresponsible crowd pleasers: "If the Americans do not like what is happening, they can send in the Marines; then there will be 200,000 gringos dead. We will make trenches in the streets." Although the U.S. had done nothing more than recognize his regime swiftly, he denounced "cannon diplomacy" and called for a rally of 500,000 this week in Havana.



Canal 12, Escuela de Television

DESPAIGNE'S TRIAL & EXECUTION  
"Kill them, kill them," cried the crowd.



Mauldin—St. Louis Post-Dispatch  
"THINK WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO YOU IF WE WEREN'T IDEALISTS!"